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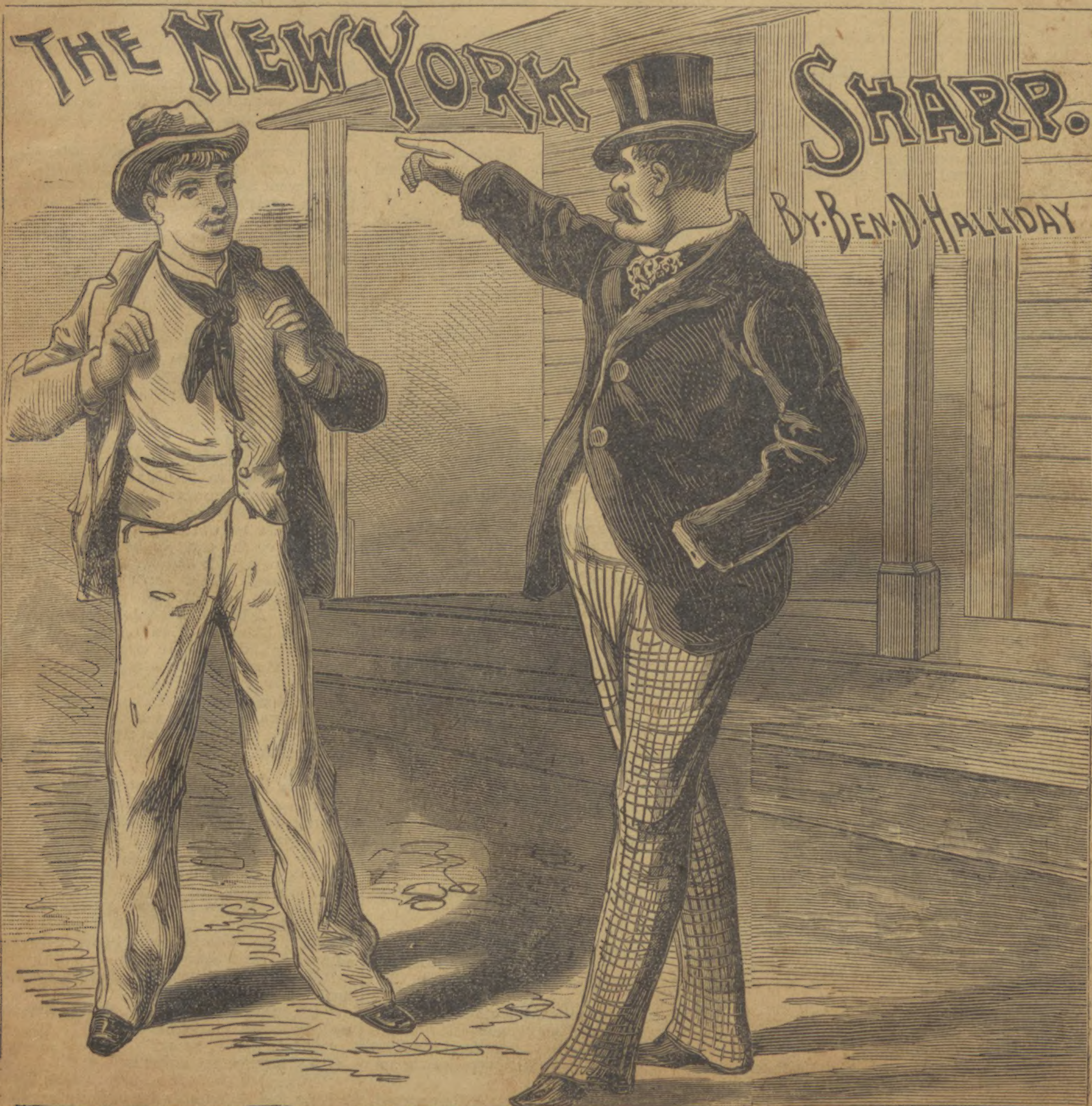
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"DON'T BE FUNNY! WHAT'S THAT PLACE OVER YONDER?" AND THE MAN INDICATED WHAT HE MEANT.

The New York Sharp;

OR,

SHADOW SWIPES' SWOOP

BY BEN D. HALLIDAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE TENEMENT.

THERE was mental distress and lamentation in Mulligan's Ark. The building was one of the tenement-houses of the east side of New York, big, ancient and fast going to pieces; the tenants were many and poor. Dirt was king there, but the human beings did not rebel at his sway or seek to dislodge him.

Some sins of omission they surely had, but most of them possessed warm and friendly hearts, and that was why they lamented now.

"Oh! the poor young man!" one of them wailed. "It's a sad end has been his, and he that young that the whiskers was hardly pushin' into sight on his face. Too young to die, too young by far!"

"And to think he has worse before him!" added another mourner. "Sure, it's a shame to be buried that way; it's myself will never die until I'm sure ave better!"

"But," interposed a third speaker, "is it sure he had no money?"

"Not a dollar!"

"And no friends?"

"Only us, here, an' we are that poor we can't help him from goin' to—you know where!"

"Potter's Field!"

"Potter's Field! Oh, oh!"

These honest souls saw nothing amusing in their lamentations, and there was nothing. One of their party had died in his humble room, and, as he seemed to be absolutely without means, it looked as if he was destined for that most melancholy disaster that can come to the human being when the last breath has been drawn—Potter's Field!

No wonder the good women shivered and bewailed, and wished they had the means of saving him from that distressed fate.

Their loud grief had attracted the attention of a youth of sixteen years who had entered the building, on his way to a certain room, but was brought to a halt by the words he heard spoken.

He was sturdy of frame, with a healthy body and a face that usually beamed with good humor, but was not without deep feeling, and the face had become grave at the statements of the tenants of the Ark.

"Who's this that died?" he inquired.

"Sure, it's James Thompson."

"Don't know him."

"He had a room up on the next floor, but it was a small room, and he was so poor he had hard work to pay even for that."

"Got ter go to Potter's Field, has he?"

"He has, sure, for he hadn't no money, and all o' the folks in Mulligan's Ark has all they kin do ter look out for themselves. But, say, Stubby Swipes, don't you know of somebody that could bury the poor young chap?"

The boy shook his head.

"Not a one. My friends are as poor as them who lives here. I'm no miser, an' I could scrape up a dollar ter go into a pool, an' mebbe Nicolo Vinzetti could do as much."

"It ain't enough—not enough by a many dollar. Oh! the poor young man! Oh! the horrors of Potter's Field!"

"Oh! oh!" wailed the rest of the women, in concert.

Just then there was a firm, heavy step at the door and a fat man waddled in. He looked at the bewailing group, but did not seem moved by their distress.

"I want James Thompson!" he abruptly exclaimed.

"Sure, me mon, you'll have ter look for him in the next wurruld!" was the quick response.

"Isn't he here?"

"Only his earthly tenement, poor lamb!"

"If you mean his body, that's what I want. I knew he was dead. If I hadn't known it I wouldn't be here; that's my business. Abram Mayfield, undertaker. Terms, cash."

"What's that?"

"Am told that James Thompson, afore-said, is dead. I'm here to bury him."

"Sure, but he hasn't a dollar—"

"I have. See?" and the fat man flourished a slip of paper which looked to those followers of poverty much bigger than it was in amount. It was a bank-note, new and crisp.

"Figures, one hundred dollars!" he added, serenely.

"Has—has somebody paid you to bury the lad?"

"Don't make me say it again. Here is the price, and here is the undertaker—Mayfield, terms, cash! Where is the subject?"

"Now, see here, mister," broke in Swipes Norton, "we don't ketch onter this game. Jimmy Thompson died without a dollar or a friend but us in here; an' we couldn't raise enough cash ter buy a full-sized quail, ef it was a reed-bird. Who has thus poured glitterin' dollars at yer feet fer Jimmy?"

"Read this!"

Mr. Mayfield extended a letter, and as Swipes took it there was a general demand from the women that he read it aloud. He was not a very deeply-learned youth, but he made it plain. The letter ran thus:

"DEAR SIR:—Inclosed you will find one hundred dollars, for which I desire you to proceed to the address given on inclosed card and there find the body of James Thompson, deceased, and prepare the same for burial, giving the case your fullest and most careful attention. It is a condition of this order that you use a coffin which is plain outside, but upholstered inside in handsome style, with white satin lining. This condition is imperative. Mr. Thompson has lived poorly; he must rest well.

"When you are ready to start from the house to the cemetery you will be joined by a single carriage. I shall be there. If you have not been paid enough by this inclosure you shall have all you ask for that is right.

"On the card you will find Mr. Thompson's address, hour of funeral, moment of starting from his late residence, and other items. As to the location of the grave, I will do what is necessary, and then direct you when the hour arrives.

MRS. GRAY."

"To ABRAM MAYFIELD, undertaker."

The last word was read, and Swipes looked up to see every eye fixed upon him. He had been listened to attentively.

"Mercy me!" cried one of the women.

"A hundred dollars to bury Jimmy, an' he so poor he lacked enough to buy bread, sometimes."

"He's saved from Potter's Field!"

"Was he so poor as that?" asked Mayfield.

"He was that."

"It seems he had well-to-do friends."

"Say," broke in Swipes, "there must hev been a mystery about J. Thompson, Esquire!"

Now, humble as the residents of Mulligan's Ark were, they had an element of romance in their nature, and the suggestion impressed them deeply. Deep breaths were drawn, and heads wagged wisely.

"There was a mystery, sure!" they agreed.

Then the company sat spell-bound over the matter for several seconds, but it could not last long. They were eager to tell how strange

it was that the poor young man had lived and died in one way and was going to be buried in another, and very different manner.

Abram Mayfield was there on business, however, and he did not long allow other things to interfere. He asked again where he was to find his "subject," and the boy was selected to lead him up.

Swipes Norton, was not unwilling, called Stubby Swipes by his familiars, knew Mulligan's Ark well. He had a friend there, and often visited him. Thus, he knew most of the other tenants, though he never had met James Thompson.

The deceased man had died in his own room. It was of fair size, but low of ceiling, and altogether was a miserable abode. Everything was in rags, and it would have been a typical room of Mulligan's Ark had not scrupulous cleanliness marked the whole place.

Since James Thompson died, his neighbors had done the best they could for him. He looked peaceful in his last sleep, but it was not of this that Daniel Norton, alias Swipes, thought as he looked.

"He wuz of a different rank than us folks," mused the boy. "Queer that even poverty sent him ter Mulligan's Ark. Guess he knew more about palaces. Sure as I'm livin', there was a mystery about that feller!"

Swipes was given to activity, and, when others came to assist the undertaker, he gladly went away. He had seen James, and that had satisfied him, as far as the room was concerned.

"But won't I be on hand fer that funeral?" he soliloquized. "You bet yer socks I'll be there! I want ter see Mrs. Gray, who woun show up until the last minute, and thet come in a kerriage. Queer doin's all round!"

There did not seem to be anything more for him to see there, so he wandered out of the house. He had gone only a few steps when a gruff voice broke in on his meditations.

"Say, young feller, do you live here?"

Swipes looked up. A big man stood before him, regarding him with a question in his face as well as in his voice, and he was impressive in some ways, if not in others.

He was a specimen of a tough with an ambition to be well dressed, and betrayed evidences of the taste to be expected from such a person. He had donned a flashy suit, with trousers like a checkerboard, a very loud necktie of red, and other things in keeping. A big tall hat sat on top of a head that was like that of an ox, and stubborn black hair and mustache made him look as belligerent as his face was ugly.

Just now he wanted to be amiable, but he could not change that face. It was bound to be sour and indicative of the bully.

Add to this that his right hand was gone at the wrist, and the picture is perfect.

Swipes looked closely at the questioner. He recognized the typical bar-room frequenter, but that did not make any difference, then.

"Do I live here?" the boy repeated. "What, in the street? No, I don't live here. I live in a house."

"Bah!" growled the man, growing surly.

"Don't be funny. What's that place over yender?" and with his perfect hand he pointed to indicate what he meant.

"Which place?" persisted Swipes, smiling maliciously.

"Oh, come off yer roost! Say, is that the rookery called Mulligan's Ark?"

"That's just it, sport!"

"An' a tenement house it is, eh?"

"Yes, a ten times ten-ement house, for it holds a full hundred—that Ark does. But I say, sport, what's your biz, anyhow?" eying the fellow sharply.

"My biz? What's that ter you, boy?"

But I'll say now that I jest want ter see a dead man over there."

"Hullo! You do? How's that?"

"I've come ter bury a sartain James Thompson!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SHARP AND HIS AGENT.

SWIPES NORTON looked at this specimen of the combined New York Sharp, Shark, and Sport—the S. S. S. as they are denominated in bar-room and behind the baize parlance—with sudden gravity and astonishment.

"Eh?" he cried. "What's that?"

"I say," replied the man, "that I'm here to bury James Thompson!"

"What James Thompson?"

"I never heerd o' but one. He lived in Mulligan's Ark, an' he died there a day or two ago."

"An' you want ter bury him?"

"Yes. Is thar any law against that?" growled the man with one hand.

There was not, and Swipes did not think of invoking the law, but he still was the picture of bewilderment.

Here was another man who wanted to bury James Thompson, and it had been supposed that James was as friendless as he was moneyless.

Swipes tried to pull himself together and get at the mystery.

"Be you his brother, mister?" he asked.

"Not as much as a cousin; no relation. Never see the man in my life."

"Oh! you're an undertaker?"

"Me? Say, do I look like a bird o' that sort? Wal, I should hope not. No, I ain't an undertaker, nor a undertaker's drummer."

"Then why do you want ter do the job o' buryin' him?"

The question was bluntly put, at last, and produced effect. It changed the whole demeanor of the stranger. His black brows contracted, and he looked at Swipes as if he had been deeply insulted, or in some way misused, and therefore meditated resentment.

"See yere, w'ot do ye want ter know that fer?" he demanded.

"Fer information, of course."

"Wal, I don't allow nobody ter go quizzin' inter my biz, I don't. I won't hev it. See?"

The boy, quick of wit, did some rapid reasoning. He immediately suspected that this man had some secret connected with the case, else why should the curiosity of his young questioner make him angry and suspicious? Was there something in this sport-sharp's business that would not bear the light of day?

He determined to try for more information.

"I don't want ter meddle, mister," meekly and warily replied Stubby. "All that dug at my brain was that Jimmy Thompson was so poor that we were fearin' he would go ter Potter's Field, an' now up you pops and offers to care for him. That's all."

The stranger's face cleared.

"He won't go there. I'm goin' ter see him decently put away. Be you sure that that is Mulligan's Ark?"

"Yes, that's the identical shebang."

"Tumble-down old shell, ain't it?"

"That house has got the jim-jams, mister, an' them who lives there has got an epidemic o' dead broke."

"Young feller, the house may be a wreck, but I've got the money ter do all I hev said."

"I presume nobody will object over there."

"I don't care a rap what they want over there. I'm a gentleman, an' I've got money ter burn."

The speaker pointed to the tenement, and his expression became decidedly fierce as he thus exploited his own qualities.

Coarse ruffian that he was, he had in his

make-up elements that would have been grotesque had not the occasion been so interesting to Swipes. The latter ignored all peculiarities of character, however, in considering other strange facts.

Another man who wanted to take care of James Thompson's remains! It was simply astonishing.

The one-handed man had apparently satisfied himself, and, soothed by the contemplation of his asserted riches, he grew more amiable once more. He turned away from Mulligan's Ark.

"That's all fer now," he added. "Wanted ter locate the place positive, so I could send an undertaker around. I'll see that it's done up in the best o' shape. No long an' vulgar percession, boy, but a comfortable funeral fer the diseased. See? Elegant coffin, with white satin linin'. Ketch on?"

"That will be swell," agreed Stubby.

He wanted to ask more questions, but his companion's fierce air and easily-aroused suspicions forbade it. He had another plan.

The man with one hand had a little more to say, and then he moved off down the block, with his ruffianly swagger. Swipes shook his head.

"Tough case, he is! He would kill a man for ten dollars, I do believe. Low ruffian, ef ever I seen one. So he wants ter bury Jimmy Thompson! Jee-blazes! is all New York goin' ter do that trick? It's dead sure this black giant ain't no philanthropist, whatever the mysterious Mrs. Gray may be, an' I guess I'll glide after Mister Tall Hat an' see w'ot he does."

It was not hard to follow. The stranger was slouching away at an easy pace, and did not seem to think of pursuit.

Thus, Stubby had a clear field and needed to do no fine work.

A walk of ten minutes took the S. S. S. to a saloon on a corner. That it had been his destination was made clear when he entered, with a business air.

"Bad!" murmured the pursuer. "I can't do that, fer Tall Hat would spot me, an' then he'd know I wuz shadowin' of him. Still, I've got ter have a look in there, an' that settles it. Here goes!"

He moved around the corner until he found a position where he could get the desired view. When this was done he saw the man with one hand again.

This time he was not alone. He was seated at a table with another person, and they were engaged in earnest, secret conversation.

The second man was younger, better looking and more intelligent than the other, and Stubby speedily marked him down as the leader of the pair. He was but little less objectionable to Swipes than his associate, however. He was richly dressed in fashionable garments, but he was quite as flashy, in his way, as the other.

It was a suspicious couple, but representing different grades of society and intelligence, if not of character.

"That's a fine pair," muttered the shadower. "Either one would be likely ter show up in the Rogues' Gallery, ef a hunt was made. Looks as ef Tall Hat was reportin' ter his nibs. That makes Nibsey the leader. They talk mighty serious but not melancholy. Mourners? Not much! They hev got a mystery between them, an' they're chewin' on it."

He watched for awhile, but finally aroused as a man who had a shoe-blackening establishment outside the door came forward and looked in. The "Shine!" then retreated to his stand, but Swipes had an idea.

He accosted the bootblack.

"Did ye notice them two at the table?"

"Yes."

"Ain't the swell-lookin feller named Clarence Roseman?"

"No. That's Carl Cavendish."

"Oh! is it? Who's that with him?"

"His name is Bat Morrison."

"I thought he was Tommy Griggs, the boxer!"

"Why, Bat hasn't got but one hand. He couldn't box!"

"Oh! hasn't he got but one? Wal, I wasn't sure o' him, but I did think I knew the toney chap. Carl Cavendish, eh? Ain't he a Wall street Lanker?"

"Ha, ha! Guess you won't find no banker in them men, old stock. Cavendish is a card-sharp, an' Bat is only a tough that he works when he needs him."

"Where do they live?"

"Don't know. All I can tell is that they come here, now an' then I shines 'em up fer 'em, but I hate the two ave them. They're a bad pair all through. Wonder what business they have now, that they're so earnest over? Mebbe Cavendish has planned to break inter a bank, an' Bat is ter do the job."

Stubby saw that it was safe to talk, and so asked more questions about the card-sharp and his ugly associate, but he learned nothing.

He lingered for some time, hoping they would come out, but, as they kept by the table, he finally decided to go his way. He did so at a slow pace.

"I don't know that I'm called upon ter meddle with them," he meditated, "but it's queer why that Bat is interested in James Thompson. He ain't the sort ter do a good deed to nobody. Mighty odd!"

Deep in thought Swipes moved on, but, when he had gone several blocks, he was abruptly aroused. Turning a corner he came upon a scene of excitement.

A young man was there in the grasp of two policemen. This was nothing strange, but the boy was impressed by the prisoner. He was a well-dressed, rather fine-looking person, and both intelligent and aristocratic. Just now he was in great mental distress.

"Gentlemen," he was saying to the officers, "there is a terrible mistake about this. I am not the man!"

"Then your looks are against you," replied one of the policemen.

"I am not to blame for that. You are in error. I am innocent."

"Prove it on trial and you will go free."

"On trial!" cried the prisoner, wildly.

"It will then be too late. I need my freedom now, and I need it desperately. Gentlemen, I beg of you to release me. If you do not an awful calamity will follow!"

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE SURPRISE.

THE policemen remained cool and unconcerned, but Swipes Norton was more moved. He believed the prisoner to be sincere in one thing, if not in another, and his declaration of calamity to follow his arrest was made with a despairing utterance.

"You should have thought of that before," replied an officer.

"I am not to blame for this situation," reminded the prisoner.

"How about the jugglery in Denver?"

"I tell you I am not the criminal you mention. I am an honest man. My name is Harold Forrestal, and I have no connection with crime. I am innocent."

"We will take you to Police Headquarters, and then all you have to do is to summon your friends and prove that you are not Cracksman Tommy, the Denver fugitive."

"But, I have lived in New York only a year, and you tell me your man has been a fugitive as long as that. How can I prove my innocence, off-hand?"

"Prove it on trial, then."

"It will be too late—too late!" cried the man who claimed the name of Forrestal, wildly.

"Humph!"

"I am not the escaped criminal. I beg of you to let me go."

"Can't do it. You look like the description of the crackman, and we have orders to arrest such a man on sight. We have done it, and now you will have to go to Headquarters. If you are innocent, you need not be shut up more than a week."

"A week! Oh! horror, horror!"

Forrestal clutched at his throat and seemed to be gasping for breath. The policemen smiled skeptically, but Swipes, looking on, was sure that the young man was quite as much moved as he claimed to be.

"Are you an actor?" asked one of the officers.

"I need to act—if ever man needed to do it I do now. If I don't act, and promptly—Oh! what calamity will follow!"

The pallor that had come to the face of the man, added to his appearance of anguish, moved one of the policemen to inquire:

"What do you want to do?"

A swift change went over Forrestal's face. He hesitated, wavered and seemed incapable of reply until the smiles of the officers brought back the power of speech.

"I have a friend, a very dear friend," he explained, "who needs me sorely. He is dead—"

"Is that all?"

"All? No! It is not all. Death is a small thing compared to that which will come if I do not get to him. I must go—now, now!"

"Who is this friend?"

Again Forrestal paused and hesitated, but he finally spoke with plain reluctance:

"His name is James Thompson. He has no friend but me, and Potter's field menaces him. I must go to him, I must see that he has respectable burial."

"Jiminy!" gasped Stubbs; "here's another!"

"Send your money around and your friend will be buried all right," suggested the officer. "That can be arranged, for it is a small matter."

"Small? Oh, man, man, you do not know. It is not all. Something awful beyond description will happen. I beg of you, let me go! If you do not, I shall go mad!"

Forrestal threw up his arms with a wildness of tragic gesture that carried conviction to Swipes Norton's mind and chilled him, but the very vehemence of Forrestal's emotion aroused new doubts in the minds of the policemen.

"Gammon!" exclaimed one. "You are putting all this on. We won't let you humbug us any longer. Get him to going, Jim!"

Both officers laid hold of their prisoner roughly, and he was dragged away. He went calling out almost in frenzy, and the horror expressed in his tones, and pictured on his face, seemed to have turned Swipes to stone.

Scared and bewildered, he kept his place on the corner.

"What does it mean?" he wondered, staring after them. "He is in a regular collapse, an' he means it all."

Just then the voice of the prisoner floated back.

"Oh, James, James!" he wailed; "this awful thing is all my doing!"

Then the party moved out of sight of the bewildered boy.

Swipes rubbed his head hard and tried to get a clear understanding, but in vain. It was singular enough that here was a third person who wanted to bury James Thompson, the friendless, but this time there was far more. The assertions of the prisoner were seething through the boy's mind.

"Somethin' terrible is goin' ter happen!" he muttered.

Minutes passed before he could think clearly. Then, if it had not been too late, he would have run after Forrestal to offer

his aid; but the others had been allowed time for a good start, and he remembered that the prisoner had declared there was nobody to whom he could appeal to identify him and free him from arrest.

"Don't see that I kin help him," was the decision, at length. "I guess about all I kin do is ter go back ter Mulligan's Ark an' see how things is goin' on there. My help may be needed, ef Forrestal is so anxious about Jimmy's bein' buried right. But there is more. He said somethin' terrible would happen, ef he wasn't around. Now, there is another string ter this thing. What?"

He thought it over earnestly.

"Must be another person who will be hit hard. Who is it? Ef somebody don't do the right thing by Jimmy, somebody will meet with some awful calamity— Say, I can't see into it at all, but I'm goin' ter haunt Mulligan's block an' see all that's done there."

Back to the Ark he went. The shadows of night were falling when he arrived, and when he went in he had another story to hear. It was from the indignant women.

Bat Morrison had been there with another undertaker, and, when the tough learned that they were too late, he had made a scene. Despite the fact that all the work he claimed to wish to do was done already, he had tried to force himself and his undertaker upon them, and when he was refused he stormed like a madman.

He had finally been forcibly expelled from the building by male tenants, and then he disappeared, but he went seriously disappointed, and vowing vengeance.

This was the situation when Stubby returned, and it surprised him anew. Why was Bat so determined to act as master of the funeral?

The boy lingered at the Ark until ten o'clock. He talked much with the tenants, but gained no new light, and, at last, he decided to go to his own home.

"But I'll be on hand fer the funeral," he promised. "That Bat Morrison will make a row, an' mebbe others will. I'll be here."

When the shadower first touched the bed he was so nervous that he believed he should sleep but little, but he was too young to be long affected thus. He fell asleep and rested well until daylight.

The "funeral" of James Thompson had been set by Mrs. Gray at a very early hour in the morning, and Stubby hastened around to see the first of everything.

He saw no sign of Bat, and nothing of a mysterious woman in a carriage, but Undertaker Mayfield soon appeared.

"All is ready," remarked Abram, "and, as I am busy, I will go ahead at once. We will bring the subject down."

He nodded to his man, and they climbed the stairs. The women of the Ark stood in a group at the foot of the lower flight, eager to see and gossip.

Swipes Norton wanted more than that, and he followed Mayfield and his man. The floor was soon reached where Mr. Thompson had had his room, and then Abram rapped on the door. There was no reply.

"I presume the watcher is at breakfast," he observed. "We will go in on our melancholy errand."

He opened the door, and passed inside with his man at his heels. Stubby was not without some awe of the dead, and he lingered irresolutely in the hall.

A moment of delay; then he heard a cry from the room.

"What's this?"

"What does it mean?"

Following the cry both men had spoken in concert, and the boy summoned his courage and pushed forward. There was so much of import in their tones that he wanted to see what it meant.

He crossed the threshold; he saw them

standing by James Thompson's coffin, and as he knew the man had been laid there, he supposed that the raised cover gave them view of the dead. What, then, had caused their excitement?

He pushed further forward and looked for himself.

The coffin was empty!

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERIOUSLY GONE.

SWIPES NORTON looked for a moment in surprise; then he changed his gaze from the coffin to the face of Undertaker Mayfield. The wonder expressed there did not fully enlighten the shadower.

"Say, where is Jimmy Thompson?" inquired the boy.

"Just what I want to know," answered Mayfield.

"Did you expect ter find him in there?"

"We put the subject in the coffin, and there we surely expected to find him now."

The undertaker turned and looked around the room. It was precisely as Stubby had seen it last, but nowhere could they see the body of James Thompson.

"Call the folks of the house!" sharply directed Abram.

His man hastened off with celerity, and in a few moments, the women all came trooping in. Their expressions showed that they had been told the latest news.

"What has happened?" cried one of them named Maginnis.

"Just what I want to know," replied Mayfield. "Where is the subject?"

"Sure, we thought he was here."

"In the coffin?"

"Yes."

"Then how has he got out?"

With one voice they declared that they did not know.

"When did you see him last?" proceeded Abram.

"About ten o'clock, last night."

"Who watched with him?"

"Sure, there was no watcher. He didn't seem ter nade it. He lived alone all his life—poor soul!—an' we thought he would mind it last night. No, there wasn't nobody. He lay alone, an' nobody was in afther the o'clock."

"Then body-snatchers have got him. He is in some medical college by this time!" declared Mayfield.

"No!" exclaimed Swipes Norton. "I pressed that measly Bat Morrison has did it all, gum!"

"Who is Bat?"

Explanations were made, and the undertaker had a full account of the one-handed man who had been so anxious to bury James Thompson. He shook his head slowly. "I thought the subject was poor as a friendless."

"So he wuz, poor feller."

"Then why should Bat be eager enow to bury him to come and steal him in ere going way?"

"Don't know, mister; but it was that Bat who did it. It must have been. That so, ladies?"

"Sure, it was!" asserted Mrs. Maginnis.

"It was that same man with one hand," echoed another person.

It was thus satisfactorily settled, but wisdom soon received a set-back. So the footsteps sounded, and a woman of the entered with a tall, professional-looking close behind her.

"Here's somebody ter say a wurrud," announced.

The stranger bowed stiffly to Mayfield.

"Are you the undertaker?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"I am Otis Peters, and I am a detective. I have been sent to tell you that you red, wild have trouble in getting your deceased m' Madam, the cemetery. A rival undertaker is to make mischief."

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"How is that?"

"An undertaker named Broadly—perhaps you know him; a fellow of dubious repute—wanted this job, and he is so sore about losing it that he is going to try to get it, whether or no. However, he is only a figure-head in the plot. A man of the name of Bat Morrison is his employer, and Bat is bound to do the work."

"How?"

"The police have undoubted evidence that Bat and a gang will lay for your procession on the way to the cemetery, and try to steal the deceased. Of course the police will take a hand in that, but we wanted to warn you."

Bewilderment was expressed on every face but that of the detective.

"Say," resumed Mayfield, after a striking pause, "do you know the subject has disappeared?"

"Disappeared?"

"Yes. The body of James Thompson has gone completely and mysteriously. He was awaiting me here, but, during the night, somebody has stolen the body."

"Why, that's strange!"

"I say this Bat Morrison has done it."

"Wrong!" decidedly replied the detective. "Our information is exact on the point, and too recent to admit of doubt. Bat Morrison intends to do just what I have told you, and he surely did not steal the deceased."

"Then who in the world did?" cried Mayfield, in wonder.

Silence followed the question. Stubby thought of the young man who had given him the name of Harold Forrestal, but it was so sure that he had spent the night in a police cell that he was not to be considered.

The mystery was deepening, and it became a matter of vast interest to consider the question: Why was all this concern manifested in James Thompson, and who had stolen his body?

Why, no one could say. They had no clue, and all theories were so weak that nobody was convinced even by his own arguments.

Detective Peters had come to feel a personal interest, and he insisted on searching the whole of the tenement. It was done, but the remains were not found, and no clue to their disappearance.

The search had just ended when there came a new visitor to the Ark. A lady, dressed in plain but expensive black, entered the premises, without stopping to rap. She looked the group over carefully.

"Where is the undertaker?" she demanded.

"I am Mr. Mayfield," replied that gentleman.

"What means this delay in the start?"

"Madam, are you my employer, Mrs. Gray?"

"I am, and I have waited outside, ready to start with you, but I saw no sign that you were going to move. Why is that?"

"The subject has disappeared."

"What?"

"The body of James Thompson has gone mysteriously and we don't know where. It has simply vanished."

"Gone?" she echoed, in agitation. "Impossible! There is some trick here!" she cried, excitedly.

"So there is, but we don't understand it. This is the story," and then Mr. Mayfield told all.

Mrs. Gray listened breathlessly, and then burst forth:

"Infamous, infamous! Who would molest the poor relic of mortality?"

"We have no clue, for we did not know it."

"It was a wrong, a cruel thing!" she declared, wildly.

"Madam," interposed Peters, "you can tell us much by telling all you know of Mr. Thompson. Was he a relative of yours?"

"No," she replied.

"Who were his relatives?"

"I don't know."

"Then," added Mayfield, "how does it happen you were willing to pay me for burying him?"

"I had met him—indeed, he did me a great service—and when I read in the newspaper that he died suddenly, and was utterly friendless, I determined to repay the debt as well as I could. Further than that I know nothing. He was an entire stranger to me; I never saw him but twice, and then only casually. I know nothing of his family or history."

Mrs. Gray spoke rapidly, and she was never at a loss for words, but something led Swipes Norton to a theory.

"That woman is lyin'!" he thought, in his blunt way.

If anybody else had the same theory it was not expressed. Even the detective seemed to accept her explanation without a doubt as to its truthfulness.

There was more talk, and then she was told of Bat Morrison and the rival undertaker. She looked genuinely surprised.

"I don't know what to make of this," she declared. "Who is this Bat Morrison?"

"A low, vicious fellow," explained Peters; "a man always suspected of lawless work by the police, but not yet in their net. He is uneducated, mean, turbulent and a typical city tough."

"And he—he—a man like that—is interested in James Thompson?" she enunciated, in bewilderment.

"Yes."

"How can he be? James was never the associate of such a person."

"Never!" echoed the women on Mulligan's Ark, in chorus.

"The long and short of it is," pursued Detective Peters, "we have a most remarkable mystery to deal with. It is simply amazing!"

CHAPTER V.

AN EXCITED MAN ARRIVES.

DETECTIVE PETERS was interested, and he proceeded to ask many more questions. All of his efforts failed to develop an explanation of why James Thompson's body had been taken, or how it had been done, or who had been the means of getting it away.

Swipes Norton heard all, and he made a good listener. He was willing that Peters should do the investigating then, but he then and there made a resolution to look into the matter on his own hook, presently.

After much talk the company broke up. Mayfield had nothing more to do, if his "subject" was lost, and Mrs. Gray did not appear to want to linger. Peters went with the avowed intention of looking more closely into the affair, and the women of Mulligan's Ark had their work to attend to, and it was already much behind.

In a body the actors in the drama strolled down to the outer door. There a little more was said, after which Mayfield and Peters went their way. Mrs. Gray, making a show of going but not putting it into effect, asked the women something more about Thompson's daily life.

"It is a pity the poor should suffer both before and after death," she finally remarked.

"Sure, we know that to our sorrow!" declared Mrs. Maginnis.

"That humble room must have been almost a prison to him. Its squalor, its barren furniture, its rags—I have a mind to go and take one more look at it before I go, if you don't object."

"Go an' welcome, leddy. We must be busy—ye don't mind goin' alone, do ye?"

Mrs. Gray very sweetly said she did not, and then she tripped lightly up the stairs.

Swipes Norton winked seriously.

"I think I'll visit my friend, Nicolo Vin-

zetti, a minute," he remarked, carelessly, and he, too, ascended the stairs.

"It may not mean anything," he mused, "but it looks ter me as ef she wanted a clear coast so she could do somethin'. I'll try ter shadder her an' solve the interrogatory that's in my thinker."

He was soon outside the door of James Thompson's room. More than that, he remained there. He was bold, and he tried to open the door a bit so he could look inside, but it proved to be fastened.

"Whew!" he muttered, "that looks like biz! Why does she lock the thing when she goes fer such an errand? Say, that female woman has more of a motive than she let on."

He attempted to make use of the keyhole, and fastened his eye to that point of view. He could see but little, and that little did him less good. Mrs. Gray was moving about, and he heard her change the position of various things.

"Seems ter be makin' a search o' the premises. Queer! What is she after?"

Like an echo to his thought came an exclamation inside:

"It is gone, gone!"

Agitation and deep disappointment seemed to accompany the words, and Swipes was more perplexed than ever. What was she seeking, and what could she have hoped to find that was important enough to cause such regret when its loss was known?

"I'll be jiggered ef I ain't fell afoul of a full-sized mystery," he muttered. "Stubby Swipes, my boy, here is somethin' fer you ter do. You must shadder this gang an' swoop down onter them like an eagle."

He remained at the keyhole for several minutes, and all the while Mrs. Gray rummaged around inside. When she grew quiet Swipes suspected that it was time for him to make himself invisible, so he moved a little back in the hall and waited.

Presently the woman came out, looked hurriedly about her, and then descended the stairs with quick steps. Swipes watched from the upper hall, and saw her bustle out into the street.

"Just as ef she didn't want the women-folks ter know she was up here so long," he decided.

He went into James Thompson's room. There was nothing to show what she had been doing. All was in good order, and as he had seen things before.

The coffin still stood on the bench, and he gazed at it curiously.

"Wonder who will heir that thing?" he soliloquized. "Jimmy won't need it no more, an' it's too pretty ter be wasted."

He looked into the box. There Thompson had lain to sleep his last sleep, his friends thought. How had he gone?

"Can't see fer the life o' me why anybody should steal him," mused the shadower.

"When a feller's dead he's dead. It's our duty ter use him right, but, why should we fight onver him? Why should we crib his mortal remains? There's Mrs. Gray, an' there's Bat Morrison, an'—I wonder where Harold Forrestal comes in?"

Swipes rubbed his nose meditatively.

"By jing! I'm goin' over ter Police Headquarters an' see ef I kin git in ter see Harold. Ef I can I'll announce this new departure an' see w'ot he thinks of it!"

Brightening up over this plan the boy hastened out of the room. He rattled down the stairs, reached the lower hall and was on his way to the street when he had a shock.

The outer door was flung open forcibly and a man entered.

Stubby recoiled. The new-comer was wild of expression and panting with some inward commotion. Altogether, he looked so much like a madman that Swipes was scared.

He put several feet between himself and the stranger, whereupon the latter leaned against the wall and, pressing his hand to his breast, kept up his hard breathing.

If the street shadower had been calmer, himself, he would have seen that all this was like the manner of a man who had run himself out of breath, but the one thought of the boy was that he had to deal with a crazy man.

"Is—is it done?" gasped the intruder.

Swipes did not know what was referred to, but he tried to be reassuring and easy of conduct.

"All done," he replied, promptly.

"Merciful heavens! Is it over already?"

"All over."

"It was a mad, a cruel act. Why was such haste used?"

"So as to avoid bother."

"Bother! Oh, to think of it! Bother! And was that man worth so little? Where did they bury him? Quick, boy! Speak out! Where did they bury him?"

"Oh! that's what's eatin' ye, is it?"

For the first time Stubby began to understand; and, more, he was not puzzled to find a brand-new man interested in the now celebrated case! On the contrary, as he looked more critically at his companion, he recognized Harold Forrestal!

"Escaped from the police, by jing!" the shadower thought.

"Quick!" repeated Harold. "Where did they bury James Thompson?"

"So you knew him, did ye?" pursued Swipes, with the same innocent air, anxious to learn something.

"Boy, will you answer me?" cried Harold, excitedly. "Is Thompson buried?"

"Yep," was cheerfully responded.

Forrestal clutched at his throat.

"Horror, horror!" he gurgled, rather than spoke, and his manner told of the deepest mental distress.

"Why do you want ter know?" asked Stubbs. "Did ye know Jimmy? Be you his brother, or his uncle, or his nephew? Wot was he to you?"

"I ask you, where was he buried?"

Forrestal suddenly displayed angry emotion, and he leaped forward and grasped Stubby by the throat.

"Speak!" he almost howled. "Where is he buried?"

The violence did not frighten the boy, but he saw plainly that it was too serious a subject to joke upon, so he was willing to relieve Forrestal's mind.

"Mister," he returned, "there's a mystery. Somebody has stole poor Jimmy's body."

"What?"

"When we got up, this mornin', the body was gone. The undertaker come ter do his job, but there wasn't no subjick fer him ter operate onter. We hev hunted high an' low, but the body of James Thompson, Esquire, has gone an' we can't find it. Nobody kin. It has been stole."

The small remnant of color in the listener's face died away. His horror seemed to increase.

"Oh, this is awful!" he gasped. "Gone? Stolen? Then he has been seized by medical students, and, before now, is cut to pieces!"

CHAPTER VI.

CARL SENDS FOR HELP.

SWIPES NORTON looked very seriously at his companion.

"It wouldn't be no joke ter git cut up by medical fellers," he admitted, "but others hev been through it."

Forrestal evidently tried to rally.

"Thompson was my friend," he explained. "He and I have been very intimate for months, and he was a good fellow. Why

should it not impress me terribly to think of him under the knives of the surgeons? I say it is infamous to maltreat the dead."

"Say," abruptly questioned Swipes, "how did ye escape them policemen that gobbled ye, last night?"

Forrestal regarded him more sharply.

"What do you know of that?" he demanded.

"By mere accident I seen you arrested an' lugged off ter the frownin' Bastile."

"Assuming that you speak the truth, I will briefly say that I was arrested because it was ill-luck to look like a 'wanted' criminal from the West. This morning my cell was opened and I was told that news had come that the law-breaker was surely arrested in St. Louis. Hence, I was liberated. But, boy, this disappearance of James Thompson's body! I want to know more about it."

He produced a dollar bill, and Swipes did not scruple to accept it. When he had done so he felt that he ought to earn his money, and he told Forrestal all that he could.

The latter listened in wonder and bewilderment.

"I cannot conceive why all these persons are so interested in poor James," he asserted, "but that is not the point. James is in the hands of medical men. It may not be too late to rescue him. I will try to locate the poor fellow!"

With this Forrestal turned and fairly raced out of the house and down the street. Stubby watched him thoughtfully.

"Mebbe you're right," he muttered, "but I don't take no stock in medical men, this trip. I don't believe it was them who did it. No; but, jingol who was it?"

Swipes did not feel content to remain inactive, and, as his suspicions would not let Bat Morrison remain forgotten, he presently took a walk to investigate the rumor that Bat had planned to waylay the procession and steal the body.

He did investigate it, and found it to be strictly true.

For awhile he was staggered, but the doubt did not remain.

"May hev been all a bluff," he soliloquized. "They could hev done it easy, an' it would hev throwed suspicion off'n them, mebbe. Now, Swipes, my boy, why can't you find Bat, talk pretty ter him, git inter his good graces an' so shadder the gang from a point inside the enemy's own camp? Great ideal I'll do it."

He looked for Bat, but did not find him, so he returned to Mulligan's Ark.

He had not been there more than five minutes, and had just finished making inquiries of the tenants when Harold Forrestal reappeared.

"Is there anything new?" he asked.

"Not a thing," replied Stubby.

"I have been busy, but I find nothing to give me light yet. Possibly I was wrong in suspecting medical students. My mind returns to the other parties who wanted to do the burying. This Bat Morrison you have mentioned—did he look like a detective?"

Swipes laughed aloud.

"Not much, he didn't! He was a tough!"

"May he not have been disguised?"

"Bat Morrison couldn't no more disguise himself than a whisky-barrel could. Besides, there wouldn't be much good in a detective with only one hand."

"What do you mean?"

Forrestal showed new interest, and several quick changes passed over his face. Then he suddenly grew excited and exclaimed:

"A tough-looking person minus one hand? Strange! Do you mean to say that is right?"

"Jest right, m'ster. Do you know him?"

"Know him? This settles—I mean, this does not settle anything, boy. Thompson never had such an associate—he was not of that class, in life. We will drop the party you mention. I'll bid you good-day for now

—I want to go to another medical college. Good-day!"

Forrestal seemed to be afraid he would be questioned further, and he once more hastened off with long steps. Swipes watched him soberly and then shook his head.

"Gammon! I ain't quite stone blind, old chap. You know who the one-handed man is, an' it has given you an idea. Bat wasn't all a benevolent doer o' good when he volunteered ter care fer Jimmy. Not by a marine mile or two!"

The speaker proceeded to do some more reconnoitering, carrying out his idea of shadowing those who had taken part in it.

He interviewed persons along the block, and cabmen, and others who were likely to have seen the undertaker's subject carried off the night before. He learned absolutely nothing.

He was on his way back to Mulligan's Ark when an old acquaintance suddenly appeared in his way. It was a person no less than Bat Morrison, and, though the attempt was a dismal failure, that man clearly tried to look amiable as he greeted Swipes.

"Hullo, old feller! I want ter see ye!"

"Keep yer lamps open an' it will be dead easy."

"It wuz about James Thompson, ye know."

"Wot o' him?" alluringly inquired Swipes.

"What's this mystery at Mulligan's Ark?"

"Don't you know?"

"I'll be shot ef I do!" declared Bat.

"But, I say, you've been on the ground; you have seen with your own eyes, an' heerd others talk. Ain't you no clue? Don't you know how James went out o' sight so pert an' sudden?"

"Bartholomew, I don't."

Bat meditated for a moment, and then assumed a genial air.

"Doyer want ter earn a few dollars?"

"Bet yer bicycle I do!"

"I know a gent who wants ter talk with you about this biz. Will you go ter him, ef there is cash inter it?"

Stubby thought of Carl Cavendish, the card-sharp, and his reply was ready. Assuming a swagger in keeping with Bat's style of people he said that he was just the "peach" for the job.

Bat was pleased, and he said so. Then he led on and Swipes followed. Five blocks they walked, until reached a house to which the leader gained entrance by means of a key.

He conducted the shadower up-stairs, and ushered him into a room of some style.

As had been expected Carl Cavendish was there.

"This is the young gent," announced Bat.

If the speaker had a grim face Carl had not. He could be very amiable when he wished, and he brought his batteries to bear on the boy, and acted the host graciously.

"We want to talk with you about the mystery of Mulligan's Ark."

"We do so!" agreed Bat.

"The remains of James Thompson have disappeared. Can you tell us how, and where to?" the sharp added.

"I only wish I could, but I ain't no clue."

"What of the others? Thompson had friends in Mulligan's Ark, and the police have been there. What is their theory?"

"B'ile it down an' they say it's a perfect mystery."

"There must have been opinions advanced," persisted the sharp.

"Wal, one person did say that a medical college might hev done it, but he hadn't no proof. Et was just theory."

"Students mad for medical knowledge," musingly continued Cavendish. "I do not think that. Boy, I am interested in the case. I want to get the facts, and I will make it

orth your while if you can tell me, now or hereafter, what I wish. Who was this woman who tried to engineer the funeral?"

"Give it up. Jimmy Thompson seemed ter be hemmed in with a web o' mystery deep as the East River. He hadn't no friends while he lived, but she popped inter sight sudden when he was gone."

"Oblige me by telling all you can. Come here!"

Cavendish walked to a writing desk that stood at one side. He produced a key and unlocked the desk. Then he turned a sober face toward Swipes.

"I hope your nerves are good," he added. "Look here!"

He flung back the cover; the interior was exposed. Swipes looked a moment, and then started back abruptly.

"Great ginger!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER VII.

SWIPES MAKES A FIND.

THE wonder of the boy was natural. To his eyes there had been revealed a big pile of bank-notes, and he was so unaccustomed to the sight of such things, even in small amounts; that he was dazzled.

Carl Cavendish laughed lightly.

"How do you like it?" he inquired.

"Great!" admitted Swipes.

"Rather nice pictures to look at, eh?"

"A pile better ter spend," declared the shadower.

"They would buy many things, and their owner can live in luxury and idleness. He can wear good clothes, smoke fine cigars, and deny himself nothing that he wishes. That's what money will do."

"It's a huge lay out!" admiringly added the lad.

"Would you like such a bonanza?"

"Bet yer bicycles!"

Carl closed the desk and locked it.

"Come here!" he then directed.

Walking to the end of the room, he opened another door and ushered Swipes into the room beyond.

The shadower had thought that Carl's outer apartment was very fine, but here he saw something even more gorgeous. The second room was furnished richly, carpets, chairs and the like being of elegant style and make, while the walls were hung with rich curtains, and the whole place a depository of things that appealed to the male lover of comfort and display.

The card sharp watched Swipes's face, and the result seemed to satisfy him. He smiled slightly and then motioned his guest to a seat.

"How do you like it?" he inquired.

"Boss, you're a high-roller, fer sure!" exclaimed Stubby. "Why, there ain't nothin' equal ter this in the house o' the King o' Turkey, or Emperor of Cuba."

Swipes was still determined to cater to his host, and some grim humor had crept into his reply, as well.

"Well, I have shown you all this to let you see that I am a man of means. Fact is, I am related to the leading families of New York, and I was born to luxury. Now, you see that I can pay all I agree."

"Looks that way, by jing!"

"Boy," added Carl, in a different voice, "I want to hire you. It so happens that you are knowing to things of interest to me, and right on the ground."

"I'm out fer cash!" asserted Stubby.

"I have said that I want to learn more about that affair at Mulligan's Ark. Can you tell me?"

"Sorry, boss, but I don't know no more—now."

"Still, you may learn more? Will you search? It will pay you handsomely. I want to know just how the body of James

Thompson went out of sight so strangely. I will give you fifty dollars to tell me how it was."

"Great ginger! that's a pile o' mon."

"All of it shall be yours if you solve the riddle. You have entrance to Mulligan's Ark. Go there often! Watch, listen, question! You can learn things unsuspected, whereas I can't. Will you enter my service?"

"Bet yer bicycle!" with enthusiasm.

"Here is a starter. This does not count on the fifty; it is an extra, for current expenses."

Carl handed out two-five dollar bills, and Swipes was really touched. The sharp might be a rascal, but he was generous. Five dollar bills were good to have.

He expressed his gratitude, and Carl looked as if he thought he had made an unusually good bargain.

Now, he pursued, "excuse me for a moment while I talk with Bat Morrison. I will return directly."

He went into the adjoining room, leaving the boy to himself. Now, as much as the shadower was interested in his game, he was not blind to the luxury around him, and his gaze wandered to the costly ornaments with real satisfaction.

"It's a reg'lar palace!" he muttered.

Close to him, on the table, was a small figure of a man of ancient times, done in some sort of yellow material. To Stubby, it looked like gold, and he reached out to handle it. Just then he noticed a slip of paper beside it.

It was only a newspaper clipping, but the shadower was not one to let anything pass. He picked up the clipping, and his eager eyes quickly made out the following words:

"The robbery at Wisehardt, Veach & Co.'s establishment, remains as much of a mystery as ever. The police have followed the clue upon which they were working a few weeks ago, but nothing has come of it. The suspected man is missing, and so is the money. The identity of the man who looked like a sport, and his companion with the missing hand, has been solved; but the police refuse to say who they were, for it is very plain that the robbery was done by somebody who had access to the premises. It is believed that the thief is hiding now in the city. His capture is expected, the officers say."

Swipes read the last word and then looked up thoughtfully.

"Sport, eh?" he mused. "Man with only one hand, eh? I recognize them. What else is inter it?"

Various thoughts went rapidly through the boy's mind, but he was interrupted by steps near the door.

He tossed the clipping back where he found it, and was looking meek and innocent when Carl Cavendish re-entered.

"We want," abruptly announced the sharp, "that you should do us a good turn. Bat has suggested that one of us hire the room James Thompson has had, and so get onto the house, and be near you while you work."

"Et won't do, boss. Peters, the cop, knows you both."

"That has been considered. A disguise would have to be used. Bat wants to make himself up—"

"Why, bless ye, mister, that won't do. Bat disguise hisself? He couldn't do that, with his face fastened onter him."

"Your remark is not complimentary, but it is true. Bat has a characteristic face, not to be disguised. I might work it, though."

"Wot good would it do? Ain't I there ter watch?"

Carl knit his brows. He thought deeply for a moment, and then replied slowly:

"Maybe we can defer this step for a while. We will not act just yet, anyhow. Do you go back to Mulligan's Ark and watch sharply. It may be you will see us

around, for we shall be busy, but you must not seem to be our ally."

"All right, boss."

Swipes left the house with his head full of instructions, and with much flattery and amiable comment from Carl.

"That sharp is a corker!" mused the boy, as he walked off down the block. "He would make honey look sour. Thinks he's got me right inter line with him, does he? Wal, mebbe! Then, again, mebbe—nit!"

Presently the shadower's thoughts wandered to the newspaper clipping. It interested him, but due thought brought no satisfaction on that point until something else fell into line.

"Looks as ef Carl an' Bat was burglars, or wanted ter be, but wot has that ter do with this case? No robbery has been done, an' the pair with only three hands between them ain't—"

He stopped short in his walk. His face took on a new expression, and he gave due heed to a sudden recollection.

"Say," he continued, unconsciously speaking aloud, "Harold Forrestal was took all aback when he heard that a man with only one hand wanted ter git Jimmy Thompson. That clippin' told of a one-handed feller, too. Wonder ef there is a connection?"

Forrestal immediately became of deeper importance, and he regretted that he had not tried to learn where he lived.

"Don't s'pose it will be of any use ter look inter the Directory," he pursued. "That bulky book only mentions a small part of our population, an' as it ain't likely Forrestal keeps house, he won't be mentioned. Still, I'll try."

He entered a drug-store and looked at the book mentioned. Much to his surprise, he found the name and address. He found more. After Forrestal's name was the description, "medical student."

"The dickens he is!" muttered Swipes. "Ef that's his own trade, he may hev known more than I allowed when he talked of medical students havin' got Jimmy."

Anxious to pursue his investigation, he walked on until he reached the block where Forrestal was alleged to reside.

He found it a much better place than was usual to that neighborhood, and the particular number mentioned proved to be a neat building devoted to flats.

"I'll go in an' see Harold," the shadower decided. "He may want— No; I won't go. I'll quiz somebody else. Who kin tell me things?"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT HAD BEEN HIDDEN?

SWIPES looked around, and he was not long in finding a promising subject. A small boy was playing near at hand, but the frequent glances he cast toward the flat settled his habitation to the elder boy's satisfaction. The latter went to the corner, bought a supply of candy, and then came down the block munching it contentedly. He paused near the object of his interest.

"Playin' hoss?" he asked.

"I would, if I had anybody to be the horse," was the quick reply.

"I would be that same, but I am lame in my off hind leg, and I've a touch o' spavin' an' ringbone onter my jaw."

The child looked puzzled, whereupon Swipes held out his candy.

"Want a hunk?" he asked.

The boy did; he said so, and he took some.

"Live near here?" pursued Swipes.

"Over in those flats."

"Oh! Big house, ain't it? Lots of other folks there, I s'pose?"

"Yes, the Howards, and the Perkinses, and the Crockers; and Harold Forrestal has a flat near ours, too."

"Hey, he does? Who's he?"

"He's going to be a doctor."
"Bully fer Harold! So he keeps a flat, eh? Nice place?"

"Oh! it's just splendid!"

"Rich, is he?"

"Maybe so, but I know his friend is."

"What friend?"

"Mr. James."

"Who's he? Does he live there, too?"

"No, he visits there—though Harold did tell my mother, once, that it was Mr. James who furnished all the money to put things in the flat. He's awful rich, Mr. James is."

"What fer a looker is he?"

This question had to be translated to the other boy, who was not of the class in life addicted to slang, but, when he knew what was wanted, he told in his childish way how "Mr. James" looked. He was vivid enough to astonish Swipes. He was sure that "Mr. James" was none other than James Thompson, and he was staggered.

"Do you say he's rich?" the shadower demanded.

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Because he and Mr. Forrestal spend so much money. They smoke awful good cigars, my father says, and they have fine suppers sent to the flat; and they go to eat at a place called Delmonico's when they feel like it, and Mr. James gave my sister a diamond ring, he did!"

The speaker seemed to feel that this was a clincher, and so it was. Stubby looked rattled. James Thompson, who lived like a beggar in his wretched room at Mulligan's Ark, had the means of supping at Delmonico's and giving away diamond rings!

"I'm groggy!" muttered the investigator.

"You're what?"

"Say, tell me all about your Mr. James."

The small boy was not reluctant, and, though his way was that of a child, he was clear enough to suit Swipes. He told of various things that went to prove all he had claimed, and when it was done, the shadower could not doubt.

James Thompson had passed a part of his time at Mulligan's Ark, and there lived like a beggar, and the other part in grandeur, high living and elegance at the flat!

Mysterious Thompson!

The small boy offered to take his new friend in and introduce him to Forrestal; but this was not in keeping with Stubby's wishes, so, when he had learned all that was possible, he wandered off.

"Fact, by jing!" he muttered. "Jimmy Thompson was a corker while he lived, but that does not explain who has him now. Mayfield don't know, and Bat Morrison an' Carl don't, an' Harold don't. Who does? An' why was he stole after he was defunct?"

It surely was perplexing, and Swipes did not see his way clear. He was wholly committed to his project of finding out something, not because he had made a bogus bargain with Carl, but on account of his previous devotion to the case.

"I've got ter swoop down onter them," he declared, "but—how?"

Unconsciously he was walking toward Mulligan's Ark, and arriving there in due time, he ascended to the room where Thompson had lived.

Everything was as he had last seen it, and the coffin was eloquent with its silent voice. It was the only speaker, audible or dumb.

He was looking around when Mrs. Flynn, a tenant, appeared.

"Sure, an' are you here, Stubby, me boy?" she exclaimed. "Maybe you're lolke me—the place draws me, whether I will or no. Sorry it is about the poor lad that lived here."

"Say, how could they carry Jimmy off?" abruptly demanded Stubby.

"We do be sound sleepers here."

"I should sneeze! You must be that way, bad. They must hev made some racket, yet you slept through it all. Mighty odd! The whole biz is mysterious."

"It is thot!"

The good woman wagged her head, and then she suddenly came nearer to Swipes. Her expression was serious and worried.

"Say," she continued, "do I look wild, like as if I was losin' me moind?"

Her manner was that of a person all in earnest, and the shadower took her at her word.

"Not a bit of it," he replied, heartily.

"No glare ave me eyes—no frenzy ave manner?"

"Not a bit of it, mum."

"Then I don't understand it at all, at all!"

"What?"

"I'll tell you a story, Stubby, me lad, but niver a soul must you say a worrud to about it."

"Heave ahead!"

"You mind the noight but one after Jimmy Thompson died? He was left here, waitin' fer the mornin' ter come so he could be carried ter his last home. He hadn't no watchers, you know."

"Ido that. Ef he had had them he wouldn't been stole."

"Right, lad, right! Well, it was along in the noight that I woke up, an' me first thought, it was ave poor Jimmy. It come ter me that it was lonesome fer him to wait alone up here, if he was dead, so I made up me moind to slide up an' see him a wee bit."

"You see somethin'!" cried Swipes.

"What?"

"Did I see it, or did I dream the whole? That's what I want to know. I come up—or dreamed I did—an' I was walkin' inter the room as bold as you please whin I see there was somebody else here, ahead ave me—or I dreamed I did."

"Git a move on an' tell it quick!" urged Swipes.

"I looked in, an' thin I see a veiled woman here. She wasn't none ave our sort—I could see that, first off, ef she was clothed all in black—she looked aristocratic an' rich, you know."

"What was she doin' of?"

"Standin' by the coffin, with her hand run down inter it near the head ave the box."

"What?"

"It's true—unless I dreamed it. Yes, there was that woman by the box, an' she must have touched Jimmy as she did it. Now, what was she doin' of?"

Swipes was bewildered, and he did some quick thinking.

"Be you sure she didn't live in Mulligan's Ark?"

"I be that."

"What did she do next?"

"I'll never tell yous. I thought it was a ghost, an' the way I run was astonishin'. I skipped back to my own peaceful couch, an' there I lay an' shook an' shivered. It took me all ave two hours to get asleep. Whin I woke up I said to meself it was a dream, an' I would kape on thinkin' so ef Jimmy hadn't been gone in the mornin'."

"Say, Mrs. Flynn, she couldn't have stole him alone. Wasn't there no men near?"

"Not a man; that's true."

"You live right by the hall and you would have heard it ef Jimmy had been carried out while you was awake, wouldn't you?"

"Sure! A mouse would have startled me. I did think I heard the woman go out, a bit after I got back to bed, an' that was all."

"What could she have been doin' with the coffin?"

"That I don't know."

The shadower was silent. People were

not given to disturbing those who had been put in their last resting place without good reason. Why had this strange woman been fumbling in the coffin?

Like an answer came recollection of the time, later, that he had secretly followed Mrs. Gray up-stairs and heard her make a vain search in the room for something. Was there any connection between the two?

CHAPTER IX.

THE NIGHT INTRUDERS.

Mrs. FLYNN moved forward to the coffin. "It was about here the unknown woman was fumblin'," she added.

Mechanically Swipes went to her side and thrust his own hand inside. He touched the white satin lining and ran his fingers over it almost unconsciously.

"What could she have wanted?" pursued Mrs. Flynn.

The boy's moving hand suddenly disarranged the satin.

"Undertaker Mayfield didn't do his work any too well," he remarked, idly. "Here's a spot the lining ain't fastened down."

Mrs. Flynn bent forward suddenly.

"That's a tear," she exclaimed—"somebody tore that open! See! It was fastened down all right, first off, but it has been wrenched loose. A hole has been made in the linin', at one side."

"The dickens, you say!" and the shadower's sharp face gleamed with zeal, as he ran his own hand under the lining. Then he felt all along the top, trying to discover if there was anything beneath.

He had connected various things he knew about, and the result was expressed in his next words.

"Say, your mysterious woman was hidin' somethin' in there!"

"What should she hide?"

"Just what I want ter know. If it wasn't no value, why do it? an' ef it was o' value, it would be a mighty queer thing, when it was expected this box would be put under ground in a few hours."

"Deary me, yes! It would be a funny place to hide anything."

Mrs. Flynn was so impressed with this belief that she rolled her eyes up toward the ceiling and looked utterly bewildered, but the boy was more practical. He kept on hunting until he was certain that he could find nothing.

Whatever had been put there had gone completely.

Swipes could not understand it, and the more he meditated the less he felt able to see the way out. He did believe that somebody had stolen into the Ark when the watchers were absent, had seen Thompson and hidden something. It looked as if Mrs. Gray might, on the visit when Swipes shadowed her, have hunted for this same object, but she had looked in vain.

It had gone already, and as strangely as the regular inmate of the box.

By the time they had finished their unavailing search the day was drawing to an end, and when they went out, together, they found some of the women of the Ark excitedly poring over an evening paper.

Mrs. Flynn asked what they found to interest them so, and they all tried to speak at once, in their zeal. It ended in the handing of the paper to Stubby, who was requested to read aloud.

He obeyed, and this was the result:

"Five thousand dollars reward!" he began, "for the recovery of the body of James Thompson!"

"Saint Patrick defend us!" gasped the Mrs. Flynn.

"Great ginger!" added Swipes, astonished.

It was not long before his curiosity overcame his surprise, and he began over again and read to the end.

"\$5,000 REWARD!"

"The above sum will be paid, and no questions asked, to any one who will give information leading to the recovery of the body of James Thompson, recently stolen from Mulligan's Ark. The cash has been deposited with the banking firm of Embury Brothers, who will faithfully fill all the conditions of this advertisement."

The women of Mulligan's Ark held up their hands in concert.

"Five thousand dollars, an' fer that!" they exploded.

"Jimmy must have been rated mighty high when alive, ef that's his market value now," added the boy.

"He must have been a prince, or a duke at least!"

"Sure, I can't fer the loife ave me see what all this is about!" declared Mrs. Flynn.

The other women joined in the assertion, but Swipes said nothing. He was not so dull as to be oblivious to the things he already had learned, and began to have well-defined views which he intended to follow to the end.

The circle of women finally broke up and went about their business. Swipes had thought of going home, but, when he looked out of the window of Mrs. Flynn's room, at the front of the Ark, he noticed something that impressed him as suspicious.

A man was standing not far away, and surveying the Ark closely, but apparently thinking himself quite unnoticed.

The boy, alert to everything, determined to see what it meant.

For at least twenty minutes the stranger hung around, eying the premises; then he made off up the block.

"Now, this may be all right," thought Swipes, "an' then, again, it may be all wrong. I hate to leave here uncertain."

His friend, Nicolo, being absent for a day or two, Swipes decided to take possession of Nicolo's room and see the matter out; so, proceeding to the Italian's lodgings, he set Nicolo's clock to sound an alarm at just midnight. Then he lay down and was soon asleep.

The clock awakened him at the right time. The Ark had grown quiet, and everybody but himself seemed to be asleep. He arose, went into the hall and listened.

Hearing nothing, he went to the front and looked out. A few belated pedestrians were walking past—that was all he saw.

Not to be discouraged, he sat down on the stairs and waited, making trips, occasionally, to the front to reconnoiter.

This watch and ward were rewarded.

"There they be, by jing!" was, at length, his satisfied announcement.

Two men were discovered moving along the street and looking up at Mulligan's Ark.

"They're the night birds I'm waitin' for!" and he smiled as he spoke.

"I'll bet a bicycle they're comin' in!" he soon murmured, and the young amateur detective retreated to the stairs again.

Soon he heard steps in the hall below. This was suspicious, for he had not heard anybody on the lower stairs, so his inference was that they had ascended with exceeding caution.

Stubby bent forward and listened attentively.

"Ginger!" he finally exclaimed, "they've gone in somewheres! Where?" and then his face brightened.

"It's into Thompson's room, sure-pop! Now for biz!" and he stealthily crept down the stairs to Thompson's floor.

The door was open, but the visitors evidently intended to be very cautious, for not even the light of a bull's-eye lantern was used; only a little ray of moonlight sifting in through the window revealed them to his view.

"Ginger! they're standin' by the coffin!"

But, I say, who is this that is so interested in that empty box? I reckon—Hullo!"

One of the men had moved a little, and Stubby discovered that the man was masked!

"They mean ter be on the safe side. Wonder w'ot they'll do next?"

They did not seem in haste, but kept their places and whispered softly. Presently the shadower had a new shock. They lifted the box from its resting-place, and deliberately adjusted it to their shoulders!

"Great guns! they're goin' goin' ter steal the sarcophagus!"

It did look like it, strange theft though it would be, and his frame shook with a shiver. Weird and unnatural theft, indeed!

They moved toward the door, and his resolution was taken in a moment. He did not know that the coffin was of any value to anybody, but the lad did not intend to let it go thus.

"I've got ter stop the scamps!" he decided. "Yes, sirree!"

CHAPTER X.

A FIGHT AGAINST ODDS.

Stubby had made a brave but rash resolution. He was but one against two strong men, but this did not worry him.

Bearing the box, the night prowlers crossed the threshold. Swipes having stolen down the upper stairs, was near at hand, but fully concealed by the darkness.

They moved, taking heed only to be cautious and thus avoid discovery.

Stubby braced himself for the effort; then bounding forward, he dashed into the nearest man like a battering-ram.

The man was thrown off his feet and fell heavily to the floor. The coffin, of course, went down also, tumbling with a tremendous clatter. The sound filled all of Mulligan's Ark with a racket.

The one man who kept his feet stood as if dazed, but the plucky boy did not pause in his proceedings; immediately he lunged forward, headlong, again.

The second coffin thief, also, was toppled over, but he managed to seize hold of Swipes, and the young shadower was dragged down with him.

Both sprawled on the floor, but the night visitor proved himself a person ready for an emergency, for he wound his arms around Swipes, imprisoning him fully, and then his fingers sought the boy's throat.

The shadower realized that the game was to keep him from sounding an alarm, but there was more in it; the fellow might press too hard, and Swipes realized that his life was in danger.

The undaunted boy squirmed like a football athlete, and, freeing his throat for a moment, sounded an outcry.

"Help, help! Robbers, thieves, murder—"

But, right there, the hold was renewed, and the cry ended in a gurgle.

"You will, will you?" hissed his captor. "You meddling knave, I'll show you!"

Tighter grew his grasp, and, realizing that he was in mortal peril, the boy struggled desperately.

"Quiet!" was the command. "You won't do that again!"

The youth's strength was inadequate, but he was not without expedients. Two could play at the game, and doubling his well-hardened fists, he began to hammer the face of his enemy.

The man's hold relaxed at this assault, and again the boy's cry sounded shrilly through Mulligan's Ark.

"Help, help! Robbers! Thie—e—e—"

Again he was silenced, but, though he heard nothing of it, he had made an impression. The Mulliganites could not

help hearing that call, and were leaping out of bed in a body. There were thumps on the floor, and excited voices were calling out here and there.

"Dished!"

The single word passed the lips of the man, and he flung his prisoner off and essayed to rise. Swipes was still on the fight, and seizing a fresh hold, he hung on tenaciously.

"This way!" he shouted. "Here's the measly thieves!"

Driven to desperation, the unknown shook Swipes off, and he fell sprawling to the floor, but he was up again almost like a rubber ball, to hear his enemies making for the head of the stairs.

He sprang after them, and his hand encountered a man's coat. He held fast. Again his call sounded.

"This way! I've got him!"

His captive grappled with him. Somehow they became entangled, and both fell heavily. Swipes was not to be shaken off, and though his opponent fought lustily he kept him where he was.

"Ginger!" he thought, "this is a round-up, sure pop!"

There were men enough in the hall then, but not until a woman appeared among them with a light, and its rays fell on the fighting pair, could the situation be disclosed. Then there was an unexpected discovery.

"Pat Flynn!" gasped Swipes.

"Say, it's the kid!" muttered Flynn.

"Oh! you stupid chump!" howled the boy, "what did you get in the way fer? I thought you was them, an' now—"

He broke off and rushed to the head of the stairs. There was then light all the way down, and to his disgust he had to admit that the thieves had made good their exit from the Ark. Again Swipes turned upon poor Flynn.

"Say, you dumb animal, what did you get in my way for? While you an' me was fightin' they have all got off clear!"

It was true. Swipes and Flynn had each mistaken the other for an intruder, and their battle had given the real law-breakers time to make good their escape.

The boy detective ran down and took a look from the street door; but one view was enough. There was not a sign of his late adversaries. Understanding that they had gone beyond hope of discovery, he went back and joined his friends.

They stood around the fallen coffin, full of wonder and talk, but wholly perplexed until Stubby explained the events of the last few minutes. Then there was fresh surprise in Mulligan's Ark.

"Why should they want ter steal this thing?"

"It ain't worth carryin' off, ter a live man."

"They saw somethin' in it."

"What could be in it?"

Swipes cut these questions short by sharply exclaiming:

"You fellers are as dull as sticks! Can't you see this is a part o' the strange lay-out we've had here? When we know so much we can see it wasn't the box that interested the thieves, but something connected with Jimmy Thompson."

Conviction came to the party. They were willing to believe all he said, but it only added another complication to the mystery, they thought. Why should anybody want the coffin, even if they had felt interest in Thompson?

Swipes did not mention certain theories which he had to account for it. He was too much angered by the escape of the intruders to look upon the matter calmly.

If he had captured the men their identity would have been learned and one

mystery, at least, would have been solved.

There was nothing to do but take it as calmly as possible, so the casket was carried back to its place, and Flynn agreed to sleep the rest of the night on the floor in front of the door. They did not intend to have the theft made successful by another attempt.

Swipes did not believe there would be another, so he proceeded up to his temporary quarters and went to bed.

Morning found everything peaceful about Mulligan's Ark, but the women of the place held a meeting and decided that they must take action on the case.

"Nobody don't steal that coffin!" averred Mrs. Mahoney. "It belongs ter Jimmy, an' ef he don't fill it nobody else shall."

"Good, good!" echoed her sister tenants.

"I'll take it into me own rooms, sure."

"That'll beat the thieves out!"

It was so decided, and Stubby was not sorry; that coffin might yet play an important part in the drama to come.

Swipes had been doing some thinking, and he had decided to speak plainly to some who were so mixed up with Thompson's case. He had fixed upon Harold Forrestal as his most promising subject.

"I'll swoop down onter him," he vowed, "an' jest let him see I ain't a deaf-mute, ef some others be."

Stubby then took his way to the block where Forrestal lived, and, ringing the bell, was directed to the medical student's flat.

He knocked at the door, but receiving no answer, and finding the door unlocked he coolly walked in. He had been told that Forrestal was there, and intended to learn if it was true.

He passed along to another room, and then stopped short. A man was lying on the bed, and before the boy had time to reconnoiter further there was a stir on the part of the other.

It was Harold, but Stubby was startled by the appearance of the student. Dress and hair were alike disheveled, and the man's reddened eyes looked out of a ghastly face.

In all ways he appeared to be miserably sick and upset, and the shadower lost his power of speech for once. He could do nothing more than stare at the wretched-looking young man.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHARP GROWS ACTIVE.

Forrestal was the first to speak. He did not recognize the caller, and his voice was peevish.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded.

"Mister, I've dropped in ter orate with ye a bit," Swipes replied.

"Who the dickens are you, and what do you want?" snapped the student, almost with hostility.

"Don't ye remember me?"

Forrestal looked more sharply.

"Oh! so it's you, is it?"

"Nobody else. Name, Swipes; residence, Mulligan's Ark."

"Curse Mulligan's Ark!" cried Forrestal, wildly.

"Why?"

"The place is accursed."

"Then why do you cuss it?" demanded Swipes. "Come, ol' feller, don't feel so bad. Brace up an' hang ter yer bicycle. It will all come out right, I guess."

"Boy, will you do me a favor?" wildly demanded the student.

"Mebbe so."

Three quick steps the man took; then

he caught up a revolver from the table and faced Swipes. He held out the weapon.

"Shoot me!" he directed.

For a moment the detective's gaze wavered. Then he composedly accepted the revolver.

"All right," he evenly responded. "I'll count three an' then fire fer keeps. One!"

Forrestal folded his arms and faced the weapon with knit brows.

"Two!"

Swipes looked for signs of weakening, but there was nothing of the sort.

"Three! Fire!"

The student's lips were compressed with iron will, and he did not even shiver. He had meant all he said, and he still clung to his purpose. He wished to die.

Swipes lowered the revolver.

"Say, why do you want ter take this rash step, mister?"

"Never mind! Go on!"

"Ef you die you won't be alive—but, of course you won't. Look-a-here, this is folly."

"Shoot, I tell you. Shoot! Will you shoot?"

"Not if I know my uncle Ebenezer. Why, you crazy man, you must be in an awful panic. Shoot ye? Not ef the court knows her biz. No, and you shall not shoot yerself, either."

Swipes pocketed the weapon.

"Say, is all this the result o' Jimmy Thompson's trouble?"

"He is gone to the dissection-table!" cried Forrestal, his wildness returning. "He has been butchered by those fiends."

"Be you sure?"

"Where else can he have gone?"

"Have you found any trace?"

"No."

"Then why feel so down-hearted? You know there are them who want Jimmy. They're the ones who have stole him. Medical students be dinged! They didn't do it."

"Hopeless, hopeless!"

"Come, Harold, brace up an' take a more cheerful view o' the future. But, say, what is all this racket about Jimmy, anyhow?"

Forrestal suddenly cast off his melancholy. He regarded his caller sharply and suspiciously.

"What do you mean?"

"The competition fer him, an' the stealin' of him."

"I know nothing about it."

"Gammon!"

"I know nothing," doggedly asserted Forrestal.

"Say, old man, that won't go. You knew Jimmy like a book. You an' him was boon companions. He was much at this flat with you, an' you an' him had piles o' fun together. Lived like a lord here, an' took dinners at Del's at about twenty dollars a feed, I reckon. That was queer in a man so poor that he had to live at Mulligan's Ark."

Forrestal looked worried.

"What is this nonsense you are talking?"

"I know it all. Jimmy lived a double life. Pretended ter be poor as Job at the Ark, an' then come here an' helped you blow in the shiners like a millionaire."

"Boy, who says that?"

"I'm the feller."

"You have been deceived."

"I've got it down fine. No song-and-dance about it, mister. It was just that way. Now, why was Jimmy that way?"

"I can't listen to such nonsense. If you think as you speak, then you are crazy. James Thompson was a poor

man—as poor as he seemed to be. I won't have you defame his memory."

"All right, my friend. But, look here! You can't make others swaller that. Why not take me inter partnership an' tell me all? Do I look like a sleepy-Freddie? Don't you think a partner in yer biz would bring trade? Let me in, an' I'll find out all about Jimmy."

"Have you news?"

"No."

"Then leave me to my thoughts. I won't bother with you, boy."

"All right, my gay bambolier. Ef you see cause in the future ter be sorry fer this, remember I gave you first chance. Now, I'll give the show ter somebody else."

Forrestal had grown more serious, and he eyed his caller keenly, but even his suggestive words did not offset his youth in the student's eyes. He did not see fit to stop him.

The detective was willing to give him full chance, but it was a waste of time. He backed out of the flat, and reached the hall without being summoned back.

"Shoot him!" he then muttered. "I won't bother with his nibs."

Down to the door went Swipes, and he was soon on the street.

"Mister Forrestal kin go his own gait; I ain't no chum o' his from this time on. I'll strike somewheres else."

He had no clear plan in his mind, but chance gave him work to do. He had walked only a few blocks when he caught sight of Carl Cavendish moving rapidly along the street. The sharp was dressed in his best clothes, it seemed, and presented a very striking picture. If his clothes had made him he would have been well made.

"Say, my wicked boss has got biz on hand," muttered Swipes. "Suppose I kinder negotiate a gait an' swoop along after him."

To think was to do, and Carl was pursued with tireless zeal. He evidently did not anticipate anything of the sort, for he did not once look behind him.

After quite an expedition they reached a fine block of the middle-class sort, and there Carl mounted to a stoop and rang the bell. There was the usual delay, and then he was admitted by a colored girl.

The shadower went closer. The door was closed, though the open parlor window disclosed a tidy room beyond, when the wind occasionally wafted the lace curtains aside.

Swipes read the name on the door.

"Marchmont! Don't know them. Where do they come in?"

Voices floated out from the parlor, and the detective grew reckless. He mounted to the stoop, leaned against the wall with all the careless ease he could muster, and then listened.

Carl's tones were clearly distinguishable, and—something made Swipes start as he heard the reply.

"A woman," he murmured, "an', by jing, it sounds like—"

He made a bold move, and, leaning forward, pushed the lace curtain back. He thus had view of the parlor.

"Ginger!" he muttered; "it's her!"

He had seen Mrs. Gray, or the woman he knew by that name, and it was something of a surprise. She was looking uncertain and anxious, but Carl, sitting near her, was the picture of smiling ease.

Swipes soon recovered from his astonishment, and, still pretending to be taking comfort by leaning against the wall, he listened keenly.

"Yes, Mrs. Marchmont," Carl was saying, "I am the friend of a friend of yours. I trust I am not unwelcome?"

"Sir!"

nothing

"Who is our mutual friend?" she asked, guardedly.

"You may be surprised on hearing the name."

"I would like to hear it, nevertheless."

"It is James Thompson!"

"Aha!" muttered Swipes.

There was a deeper sound from the parlor, and the spy, risking another look, saw that Mrs. Gray was regarding her caller with a most anxious expression. She seemed to be trying to control herself, with but poor success.

"James Thompson," she finally repeated.

"Yes, madam."

"I know of no such man."

"Let us use the name, since he did. I know his true name, but it need not be referred to here. We are his friends; we know why."

"I assure you that I know of no James Thompson."

"Let us not discuss the name, Mrs. Marchmont."

"Then what shall we say?"

"Many things. I am here on business of importance."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF THE ALLEY.

Carl was still smiling, but there was that in his voice which made Swipes shake his head.

"There is ugly in that chap," he decided, "an' it is bound ter come out."

Mrs. Marchmont, since that seemed to be her real name, moved uneasily and seemed paler than ever.

"I will hear you," she answered.

"I was poor Jimmy's friend," resumed Carl. "I was anxious to be present at his funeral, but the peculiar turn of events upset my plans. Allow me to ask if you have his remains now in this house?"

"Sir?"

"Well, madam?"

"I do not understand your strange words. I repeat that I know of no Mr. Thompson—"

"Well, what of Mulligan's Ark?"

"I never heard of the place."

"Have you not been there? Are you not the Mrs. Gray who offered to pay for the funeral of the man Thompson?"

"I am not!" she steadily, defiantly responded.

"Ginger! she says it wal," thought Swipes, "but it won't go."

Carl made a gesture of impatience.

"Then let me tell you of that unfortunate man, madam. I have told you that I am his friend, and you will see that I have no ill-will in mentioning some things very plainly. Thompson was sailing under a false name at Mulligan's Ark, and he was doing it because he feared the law, madam—the terrible law!"

Carl waxed dramatic, and he had full effect upon his companion. She breathed hard, and was manifestly agitated and scared.

"I have always felt keenly for my friend," pursued the sharp. "He had a good heart, and would not willingly have done evil to anybody, only—well, you know how it was. Now, I understand how he went out of sight. Nobody but you could have had interest in getting him off as you did. He went, but I feel that I should have a chance to pay some tribute of friendship to him. Unless he has been consigned to his final home I would gladly look upon his face."

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Marchmont, "I solemnly declare to you that I know nothing of this. I am—"

"You are the woman who took the part of Mrs. Gray—"

"How did I succeed?"

"You should know."

"I declare to you that I do not know what became of the man you mention. I will swear it, if you wish."

Carl seemed staggered for a moment, and there was surly concern in his voice as he replied:

"Will you let me search this house?"

"Search my house!"

"Yes."

"Surely not."

"Then I shall believe that the missing body is here."

"Believe what you please," she retorted. "You cannot, shall not do it. Search? The idea is absurd. I forbid it, not because I fear to have you, but because I will not cater to such idle curiosity. I know nothing of the strange disappearance. Would to Providence I did—would that I did!"

"Madam, you can remove all my doubts by allowing me to look your house over."

"Possibly I can, but I will not."

"Say!" cried Carl, all of the ugliness of his nature breaking forth, "do you want me to publish his history to the world?"

"I cannot prevent it, if you see fit."

"But his name—do you want me to tell that to the world? Would you have everybody know the terrible truth?"

For the first time Mrs. Marchmont seemed to lose all courage.

"You would not do that!" she cried.

"I would—I will!"

"You are without mercy."

"Exactly! I am no weakling. I look out for myself, first of all; and that's my way now. Frankly, I do not think the remains are here, but I want to satisfy myself. I don't want to hunt elsewhere on a blind chase. If you are as innocent as you claim you can satisfy me and do yourself no harm."

There was a struggle in her mind. Plainly, she did not wish to yield, but she feared this sharp.

"If I gratify you," she asked, "will you keep his true name—and—and the rest of it—his history—a secret?"

"I solemnly promise to do so."

"Then you may look as you wish."

"Bah!" muttered Swipes, in disgust. "Why, his promise ain't worth a row o' spiled cabbages!"

The detective did not see fit to interfere, and the couple rose and passed out of the parlor.

"I guess it's time fer Esquire Norton ter skip," added the shadower. "Ef I hang around here my boss will get onter my center-rush an' block the play."

He left the stoop and walked off down the street.

"That Carl is a corker!" he thought, in disgust. "Tries ter bully a woman, does he? Well, now, that's the meanest biz a man kin be in. Say, but I got onter one thing, though—there was scratches and marks on Carl's face, an' that confirms what I've thought all along. It was Carl who tried ter steal the coffin, an' the same gent who choked me in the hall. I pummeled his face then, an' I see I left my trade-mark there. Yes, it was Carl, an' I s'pose Bat was his helper."

The shadower walked on until he had nearly reached the block where he had been so much of late. He intended to drop into the old resort for a moment, and then go down town on an errand that he hoped would give him light. He was fixed in his opinion on certain

subjects, and believed he could solve one mystery, if not another.

He was walking along when he was hailed from the mouth of an alley by the way.

"Say, young feller, hold up a bit."

He looked and saw a seedy-looking person unknown to him.

"Don't you live at Mulligan's Ark?" the questioner added.

"Yes," Swipes responded.

"Then we would like you in here a bit."

"Why?"

"We think we've found the missin' body. James Thompson died, you know. As you lived there you kin identify him. There is a lonely spot at the end of this alley, an' we found it there."

Swipes dropped his head in thought. He had not known James Thompson by sight. Could he be of any use? He did not see that he could, but he was not without curiosity.

"I'll go," he announced.

The seedy man turned and moved into the alley.

Swipes had been there himself before then, but not since he used to play as a child in that section. He knew nothing of the alley as it was then, but it seemed likely that anything could be hidden there and not found for some time.

The story seemed very reasonable. He followed the man.

It was not far through the alley, and then they emerged into a yard. Several tumble-down shanties filled the rear, and at that point another man was standing as if waiting for developments.

"Sammy Morse is guardin' it," the seedy man explained, motioning to the other man.

Swipes hastened forward. If he had beaten everybody out in the race to solve one part of the mystery it would reflect great credit on his work as an amateur detective.

He reached the side of the second man; he looked around sharply.

"Where's the body?" he asked.

He had seen none, so he raised his gaze to the faces of the men. The first of the two had followed him into a space between the shanties, so they had a little area all to themselves.

Both of the men grinned as if there was some great joke afoot.

"Don't you see it?" one asked.

"No."

"We don't, either."

"What in thunder do ye mean?"

"Fact is, there ain't nothin' o' the sort."

"Then what is it?"

"Nothin' but us two an' you; that's all there is here."

"Say, hev you been foolin' me?"

"You kin call it what you please. The story tol' you outside was all moonshine, an' we jest decoyed ye in here on a bluff."

Swipes eyed his companions closely. The grins had disappeared from their faces, and with them went the last semblance of decency. Seen as they were then, the faces were vicious and ugly to an extreme.

It flashed upon Swipes that he was in peril. What the motive of the men might be he did not know, but it was clear they were his enemies and bound on making mischief.

"Ef that's all you hev' ter say I will git out," he remarked.

The man nearest to him blocked his way.

"Not so fast, my rooster. We have business with you. Grapple him, Tom!"

The second man made a move to seize the shadower.

CHAPTER XIII.
FIGHTING HIS WAY.

Swipes had no intention of submitting to the indignity which menaced him. Whatever the object of the men was it was one of hostility, and he governed himself accordingly.

With one man moving upon him and the other blocking the mouth of the little passage between the shanties, he had but a small chance, but he proceeded to make the best possible use of it.

With his eyes open to their fullest extent he studied the advance of his most active foe, and when the proper moment came he acted.

Ducking his head he made a forward dive to pass under the fellow's arm. He was like a flash, and not only was the trick successful, but he hit the man and nearly knocked him over.

Then Swipes had both foes on one side of him, but his escape was not possible. The little passage ended right there, and he could not go on. He faced them defiantly, however.

"Say, Tom, you're no good!" cried the man who had not tried to do the catching.

"I'll have him this time!"

The ruffian wheeled again and came on, and this time Swipes was in more serious danger. He could not hope to work his artifice again, and the outlook was dark.

"I've got ter wade in fer keeps!" was his thought, and he acted upon it.

He waited not for his foe, but, stirring every muscle into action, started forward and plunged headlong into the would-be captor. He had ignored possible danger to himself from the collision, and he struck his enemy full in the stomach with the impetus he had gained.

"Take that!" he exclaimed, mechanically.

It was too much to withstand, and he bowled the man over, but another obstacle was in the way. As he was making his rush for liberty continue sharply he was seized by the strong arms of the person who had lured him into the alley. The man held fast.

"I've got ye, you little brat!" he cried.

So he had, but it was an armful, and no mistake. Swipes struck out with his fists, and he kept his legs going so constantly that the captor was showered with blows on all sides.

The entrapper surely "had him."

This fierce counter-attack was too much for the courage of the man, and he called out in his distress with pitiful intonation.

"Ouch! ouch! This way, Tommy! Help me, Tommy!"

But Tommy only sprawled in the yard and groaned as he caressed his stomach.

Swipes did not let up in his work, and presently he had cause to get fresh encouragement. Although his foe held fast he yielded to a natural but illogical impulse, and began to back away from the blows. As he took the giver of the blows with him this could do him no good, and it did do much harm. He struck his heel, and over he went, with Swipes on top of him.

The amateur detective laughed aloud at his mishap, and then, with a final effort, he wrenched himself loose and darted out of the recess.

He was fully free.

The man who had last gone down came up slowly, and, when he was on his feet he saw Swipes, several feet away, laughing at him.

"Hullo, Sandow!" cried the boy, jubilantly, "how be you feelin'?"

"You little knave," was the furious response; "you come back here."

"Not ter save yer bicycle!"

"I'll be after ye, ef you don't."

"Yes, a good ways after me."

"Come on, Tommy; come on!"

The decoyer was full of fight, and he made a forward rush, but he never had been so helpless as then. It was simply a case of footrace, and Swipes dashed out of the yard and out of the alley with his hearty and mocking laughter floating back.

He was not followed to the street. The men knew better than that, and Swipes halted on the further sidewalk and stood waiting developments. Really, he did not expect any, and none came.

"Backed out!" he finally muttered. "They had better, ef they don't want ter sleep in the police station until next grass. Say, now, what does this mean?"

He asked the question of himself with real concern. Plainly, the affair was not trivial, and he could see but one way of explaining it.

"Them fellers meant ter do me up, an' they had a reason. I never see them before, an' they can't hev any grudge against me individually. Somebody set them on. Who was it?"

Seriously, he looked at the alley for awhile, and then came the additional question:

"Has Carl Cavendish got onter my curves?"

It was not to the shadower's liking, but he was compelled to believe that this was the case. He could not think of anybody else who would have a motive in molesting him, and he would have been dull not to see that deepest malice was behind the recent attack.

"It's right lucky fer my future bliss that them snakes didn't ketch me!" he muttered, seriously.

Presently his good spirits returned, and, as considerable time had been consumed in the adventure, he decided not to go to Mulligan's Ark until he had attended to his other business.

It lay down town, and he went that way without delay.

He had not forgotten the newspaper clipping he had found on Carl Cavendish's table, and he intended to know more of the case thus dimly outlined. The way to do it, he thought, was to visit a newspaper office and consult a file, though he was not sure he would be permitted to see it.

He had reached City Hall Park when he ran upon a man who had been a policeman a few years before. He had lived near Swipes, and they knew each other well, but his work had been around the municipal buildings.

"Just the person!" thought the amateur detective, and he accosted his old acquaintance at once.

"Say, Betts," he exclaimed, after a short conversation; "do you remember a burglary, or anything o' that sort, at Wisehardt, Veach & Co.'s?"

The officer looked thoughtful.

"About a year ago?" he inquired.

"Yes, I reckon so."

"I remember it well. We have it up around the office somewhat."

"What was there inter it?"

"Well, it never has been solved."

"What is known, then?"

"Simply that there was a robbery. A big sum of money was taken from the safe; I don't know how much; and Wisehardt, Veach & Co., were all stirred up over it then. I presume they feel the same way now."

"Didn't get the thief?"

"No."

"Who was he?"

"That is what they would be glad to know. A certain man was suspected, but

there was but little more evidence against him than against you or me, and, as they couldn't find him, it was a loss of time to suspect him."

"What was the suspected man's name?"

Mr. Betts looked more thoughtful than ever, and he studied the ground in an effort to remember, until Swipes grew impatient.

"Pliny Hargrave was the name," he finally replied.

"Who the dickens was he?"

"If I ever knew his history I don't remember it now. It seems that he had means of knowing about the money not possessed by others—that's the way I remember it—and then there were other suspected parties; a one-handed man who was an old acquaintance of the police. This fellow was called a slippery customer. He always had slipped through the police fingers, and, if he was concerned in the break you mentioned, he had his usual good luck. The police never dared to arrest him on suspicion."

"Still, the one-handed chap may have been in it?"

"Yes."

"Wish you could tell me more about that Pliny Hargrave."

"I remember no more."

"Did the newspapers have an account o' him?"

"Yes."

"Will you go in an' look over a file with me?"

Betts was surprised by the request, even more than he had been by the previous conversation, but he consented. They went in, and, at the ex-officer's request, were accommodated with a file. The item was soon found, and Swipes found full reward for his trouble.

The newspaper dealt gently with Pliny Hargrave. The suspicion against him had been weak, and the police timid of accusing him, so the only way the paper learned of it was in a half-underhand manner. As a consequence, they, too, were careful.

"Seems there was fifty thousand dollars stolen," remarked Betts, reading.

"Yes. An' it belonged to an estate fer which Mr. Wisehardt was administrator, and was in the safe ter be kept safe—eh, Bettsy?—an' it disappeared all of a sudden."

"Pliny Hargrave was knowing to its presence, so he was suspected."

"Sure! An', oh! Betts, do ye see what follers? By jing! I guess there is meat in this article. It jibes with my theories, an' I begin ter see my swoop crowned with success. Look there!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SWIPES IS ARRESTED.

The speaker's finger was pointing to a certain place, and Betts nodded as he read.

"Clew to Pliny Hargrave's relations, eh?"

"It says," replied Swipes, "that he had a sister named Mrs. Marchmont!"

"That does not tell us anything."

"No?"

"We don't know where she is."

"Mebbe she might be found," gravely observed Swipes. "A good deal kin be found out by huntin'."

"Why are you so interested in Pliny Hargrave?"

"I heard a man mention it, an' I got quite a feelin' over it. You say Pliny ain't been ketched?"

"I am quite sure he has not."

"All right."

Swipes turned away from the file, and then he and Betts went out to City Hall

Park. The ex-officer had business on hand, and he said he would have to go about it. He went, but not to the shadower's regret. Betts was no longer useful.

"Jest as I thought," muttered Swipes. "Jimmy Thompson an' Mrs. Gray are brother an' sister, an' that explains her interest in him. They can't hev been very sociable, or they would not have been so fur apart in this last affair. Well, I've run a part o' this game ter earth."

He believed he had, and he summed it up thus:—

"Jimmy Thompson was a thief. He swiped the money from Wisehardt, Veach & Co.'s safe, an' he's been livin' on the fat o' the land. That Mulligan's Ark part was all a bluff. He kept up a fine establishment at Harold Forrestal's flat, an' he an' the medical student lived like lords. That's clear. Now, what about the main feature of it all?—who stole Jimmy's body, an' why did they do it?"

Right here the detective found himself wholly at fault. He was not able to advance the slightest theory, and it annoyed him.

True, it did not seem to make much difference, since a man's career ends with his last breath, but the mystery of the thing was fascinating and irritating, so to speak.

His thoughts returned to the earlier phases of the case.

"Had I ought ter go ter the police an' tell them what I know?" he wondered. "I s'pose they would like ter know, an' I'm willin' enough, but I guess I'll hold on a bit. I'll go home now."

"Home," in this case, meant Mulligan's Ark. That place of dirt and poverty would remain a magnet to him until all was made clear.

In due time he was near his destination, but he was not to reach Mulligan's Ark just then. As he neared the tenement he was suddenly aroused by sight of Harold Forrestal.

"Comin' this way, an'—hullo! them two fellers with him look a good deal like detectives. Wonder ef he has been arrested?"

Down the street came the three men side by side. Swipes noticed that they regarded him very fixedly, but this did not seem to amount to anything. He was considering whether he had better address Harold, when he was surprised by the actions of the trio, themselves.

They spread out somewhat, and Swipes found himself obliged to pass between them. As he was doing this one of the party suddenly clapped a heavy hand upon the shadower's shoulder.

"Wait a bit!" he directed.

"All right, boss," was the cheerful response.

"We want you."

"Correct! Ef I kin help you I'm yer man."

The speaker laughed aloud.

"Help us! Say, do you know who we are?"

"I suspect you are detectives."

"That's just what we are. Now, do you see clearer? We want you! You are our prisoner!"

Swipes stared in silence, too much surprised to be alarmed.

"We are going to lock you up," pursued the officer.

"You be? What fer?"

"You are charged with having robbed James Thompson after his death!"

"Say, thunder an' measles! you're jokin'!"

"Mr. Forrestal is the complainant."

"That's so," agreed Harold.

Swipes turned upon the last speaker.

Forrestal did not meet his gaze like an honest man, but his eyes sought the ground with all of the persistency of a convicted criminal's.

"You!" returned Swipes; "you charge me with stealin' Jimmy's cash?"

"Anyhow, it's gone," explained Forrestal, desperately.

The shadower looked at him sharply for a moment in silence. Then he turned away with the single sound from his lips:

"Humph!"

It meant a good deal, but Swipes was not yet ready to express himself more fully. He turned next to the officers again.

"Say, gents, hev you been taken in by this skin game?"

"Do you deny your guilt?"

"Deny my grandmother! The case ain't o' that sort. Why should I deny what can't be true? Rob Jimmy! Bah! Gents, do you know who I be?"

Swipes thrust his hands into his pockets, threw back his head, and assumed a most imposing air as he asked the question.

"Who are you?" one of the officers returned.

"A detective!"

"Oh! are you?"

"Yep!"

"Maybe you are the Superintendent of Police?"

"You're kiddin' me now. None o' that, gents. I don't claim ter be what I'm not. I only say I am a detective, an' you will do a wrong deed ef you molest me in the discharge o' my duty."

"Put an end to this!" sharply demanded Forrestal, looking nervously up and down the block, as if fearful of a crowd. "We want no more words from this cheeky boy."

"Oh! don't you?" cried the boy.

"Well, Mister Forrestal, you are likely ter get more than you want. When I open my mouth fully you may find you hev put yer foot inter it. See?"

"He grows insolent," exclaimed an officer. "Yank him along!"

Swipes faced Harold again.

"Ef it's you that's made this charge you had better go slow," he warned. "Stole Jimmy's mon? Bah! Have you seen me cuttin' any swath with it? Have I set up a richly furnished flat? Have I had big eats at Del's? Have I helped a sinner get away with his plunder? Have I ever known Pliny Hargrave in his days o' rascality?"

A sensation was intended, and one was made. Clearly, Forrestal did not think so well of his plan as he did. He changed color, and was plainly startled.

"I—I— Perhaps there is a mistake!" he stammered.

"Bet yer bicycle there is, boss!"

"Officers, maybe you had better release the lad," ventured Harold.

"It is too late, sir; the matter has gone beyond your control. You have made definite charges, and our superiors have given us orders. If you see fit to talk with them at Headquarters, you can; but we have no right to let him off. Come!"

"Hold on a bit!" began the boy; but he only got an additional jerk.

"Come!"

This time there was real roughness in the man's way, and Swipes was dragged along. He was so angry at Forrestal for so unjustly accusing him that he lost all prudence, and he struggled fiercely.

"I won't go, you measly fools! I'm an officer, myself, an' on an important trail, an' I've got ter see it out. I won't go!"

Recklessly he began to kick at his

captors, and that settled their course fully. Swipes received several sound thumps from their hands, and he was dragged away harshly.

Forrestal did not go with the party. He stood as if fixed to the spot where the arrest had been made, and his expression was that of a man with his mind in a collapse. Swipes had spoken words that carried consternation in their train, and the medical student would gladly have undone his rash work.

He watched them go, hesitating as to his own course; but he soon had something else to think about.

One moment the trio had only a peaceful scene around them; the next, two men darted out of a deep doorway and flung themselves upon the officers with fierce impetuosity.

It was an attack, and made with a definite purpose, and the officers, taken wholly by surprise, could not withstand it. One of them was felled by a blow, and the other toppled over heavily.

The assailants were Carl Cavendish and Bat Morrison.

Bat caught Swipes by the arm.

"Come on!" he cried.

One of the detectives struggled up, but Carl knocked him over again, and then both men seized hold of the boy.

"Come!" urged Carl. "You'll be arrested if you don't!"

Swipes was young, and he yielded to such an earnest demand. He was being dragged off, but he did not long need such aid. His own legs began to play, and he raced off in company with his new associates.

"Them detectives are up an' after us!" he cried, looking back.

"Let them come!" snapped Carl.

"They be comin', an' like deer, too. Worse than that, they'll soon begin ter holler fer help. Gents, we're gone up!"

CHAPTER XV.

FROM ALARM TO ALARM.

"Not much!" declared Carl Cavendish. "Those fellows are not smart enough to catch us."

As he spoke he turned Swipes from his course and steered him into an alley. It dawned upon the youngest fugitive that this was their best course, and he went willingly.

Beyond them was a dark passage, with a row of old buildings on either side, and a view of tumble-down edifices beyond all else there. Into this choice place the trio went, and after them bounded the detectives. Quite a start had been gained, however, and the confidence of the leader did not waver.

The shadower had wondered what they would do next, but his associates clearly had a definite plan. Once the yards had been separated by fences, but these had in some places yielded to the inroads of time, and there were breaks in the lines of boards.

Through one of these holes Carl darted, and Bat and Swipes followed. For a moment they paused and looked back.

"There come the cops!" exclaimed Bat.

"Hot on dur trail," agreed Swipes.

"They search for us there—they think we are in hiding!" cried the sharp, with a laugh. "Good! That is just as I hoped. Now, on this way, boy. We will soon have you out of it."

They resumed their course and passed through several yards. In some cases they vaulted over the fences, and Swipes was beginning to get winded when they reached another alley.

Through this they hastened to the street.

"I guess I kin look out fer myself now," remarked the shadower.

"It will be madness to stay around here," asserted Carl. "Wait until this thing blows over. Come with us! We have a cab here."

The vehicle was certainly there, and awaiting them, but Swipes hesitated. He did not think he wanted to enter into further partnership with them.

"On! on! You will be locked up, if you don't. On, boy!"

Carl's impetuosity carried the day, and Swipes allowed himself to be helped into the cab. Quickly the door was closed, and the driver took them away at good speed.

The shadower was too much bewildered to do any very clear thinking then. He had a well-defined impression that he was in bad company; but, with a prison cell menacing him on the other hand, he was not disposed to be too captious.

Almost in silence they went on for several blocks. Then Carl ordered the driver to halt, and they stepped out. The cab was dismissed and the sharp pointed to an ancient house near them.

"That's our refuge," he explained. "Come in!"

Again Swipes hesitated, but he was overruled. They entered, and Carl led the way to a room up stairs. It was furnished very cheaply, and was wholly unlike his usual resort, but he seemed at home and had keys to everything.

He flung himself into a chair and laughed aloud.

"Sit down, boy!" he directed. "You are safe now."

"Jiminy!" exclaimed Swipes; "this has been quite a brush."

"All over now, and you are perfectly safe. You owe us something for taking you clear so prettily."

"Them measly fellers would have arrested me."

"Why?"

"Ask them. I can't see why. Harold Forrestal accused me o' stealin' money from Jimmy Thompson. Great guns! Why, Jimmy didn't have ten cents ter his name."

Swipes was beginning to be wise again, and he looked shrewdly at Carl to see how the assertion would be taken.

"They do say he was a beggar," the sharp coolly responded.

"Queer, ain't it?"

"Very! But it was confounded mean of Forrestal to use you so."

"I'll give him a run fer his money when I see him again."

"You will do well to let him alone. Remember you are accused of crime, and can no longer go about as you please."

"Ginger!"

Swipes's face grew very serious. As this view was fully presented to him he lost courage. He had always been law-abiding, and had no intention of being otherwise. To be a hunted person was something terrible in his estimation.

The sharp laughed merrily.

"Don't be so downcast. It will all come out right. Bat and I will take care of you; we will protect you from the police, find a living for you, and make you one of us."

The boy said nothing, but, to himself, he exclaimed:

"Not much you won't!"

"You know how I live," pursued Carl. "Luxury, money in plenty, and everything the heart can desire. I am a high-roller, so called. Don't you want to be one?"

Swipes did not, but he was not rash enough to say so. While he was in the

company of his lawless companions he was also in their power, and it was the part of prudence to avoid angering them or making them suspicious.

"The picture is rather fascinating," he agreed, seeming suddenly exhilarated.

"That's what it is. Give me charge of your future, and it will be brilliant."

"Boss, I'll think that same over!"

He spoke with a pretense of great earnestness, and Carl seemed duly pleased. Little did he know what was in the boy's mind, or that he was regarded as a repulsive snake. Swipes had not one element of a law-breaker.

One thing was answered for him fully. He was still in the good graces of the pair. Carl's face still bore the marks of the blows the shadower had given him at Mulligan's Ark, but he did not suspect that his defeat there was due to his present companion.

The three men remained in the room until dark. Carl and Bat smoked and drank, and evidently enjoyed themselves very much, but Swipes declined an invitation to join in their pleasures.

Supper was served in their room, and then the men prepared to go out. They gave Swipes many injunctions not to venture from the room, and then armed themselves with revolvers and slungshots, and took their departure.

Their young guest was left alone, but he had plenty of food for thought to occupy his time.

"Say, that's a fine gang!" he exclaimed. "Revolvers and slungshots! An' ter think the police never hev got onter their curves! Maybe they will when I tell my story. Carl rescued me from danger, but why did he do it? Simply because he wanted ter make me a crook, too, an' get my help in his breaks. I reckon I ain't under no moral obligation ter keep his work secret. What fer a den be I in, anyhow?"

He looked around critically. The room looked innocent enough, but he had his opinion of it. Carl kept his home quarters like a palace. This was different. What could be its use, unless it was more closely connected with his crimes?

Swipes looked the place over, peering into closets and bureau drawers. A scant wardrobe was there, but nothing to incriminate the high-roller.

Suddenly the searcher caught sight of something more. It was like a tiny keyhole in the wall, well concealed; but, having once seen it, his suspicions grew greater.

"Wish I could get it open. If I had a key—say, I've got one about that size."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew out the article named. He tried it, and then uttered a low cry of triumph. It fitted.

He turned the key; he threw back a blind door of small size.

"By jing!"

An exclamation of wonder passed his lips. Beyond was a sort of cupboard, and it was full of things strange to see there. Silks, laces, boxes which, he believed, indicated the presence of jewelry, and various other things met his astonished gaze.

"A thieves' den, sure pop!"

He unclosed the cover of some of the boxes. Jewels were there, sure enough, and he was bewildered.

"Oh! what a haul this would be fer the police!" he exclaimed. "So they never hev been able ter connect Carl and Bat with a known crime? Well, I'm the huckleberry who can connect them like a fly. This would be a rare find fer the cops."

There was no knowing when Carl

would return, so Swipes closed the blind door and relocked the place.

"What be ye goin' ter do next, me boy?" he soliloquized. "As near as I kin tell, there is nothin' ter prevent ye from leavin' the house, an' you could lead the police here in a jiff an' win undyin' fame, but—"

He paused and shook his head.

"These crooks ain't the only ones wanted by the police. I'm hunted by them, myself, an' I ain't sure I kin risk a gallop outside. Is it best fer me ter go boldly forth, seekin' whom I may devour, or not?"

He meditated on the point. He felt sure he could tell the authorities just who James Thompson had been. They wanted to know badly, but the awful figure of the law, as spurred on by Harold Forrestal, loomed before him.

"I'm afraid it's no go. I dare not—"

The door of his room was thrown open and a woman rushed in wildly.

"Hide!" she cried, excitedly. "The police are here ter arrest you!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRANGE DEFENDER.

Swipes heard with a sinking heart.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

"The police are here!" repeated the woman, breathlessly. "Hide, oh, do hide somewhere!"

"Police, eh? Well, I don't believe I'll hide fer a cent."

"They will seize you."

"I don't think it's me they're after."

"It is; they said so. They have called for the boy who entered here. There is no other boy. You're the one they want!"

Swipes stood in dismay. It seemed that her warning was well-founded, and the near presence of danger frightened him.

"My sister is holding them at bay," resumed the woman, "so as to give you time. Go to some other room—hide, hide!"

A rather good-looking young man rushed into the room.

"This way, boy!" he exclaimed. "Come with me and I will see you safe through it all. I have just the place. Quick! They are done with parley below! It is hide now, or surrender to them. Come!"

Swipes hesitated no longer. The latest comer had the air of a respectable man, and the boy determined to put himself under his protection. He eagerly followed where the stranger led, and was conducted to a room on the upper floor.

"I hear them comin' up!" he cried.

"They will hunt the second floor first," was the answer. "When they get here it will be mighty little they will find. Here! In with you. There is safety here!"

Carl Cavendish's room seemed not to be the only place of secrets, for Swipes's new friend had opened a blind door which revealed a secret closet beyond. It was a comfortable-looking place, and the fugitive dove in readily.

The door closed; he was alone in the dark.

There was a lull of several minutes. It gave him time to think more seriously, and he began to be doubtful of the wisdom of his course.

"Why should I run away from the cops?" he muttered. "I ain't done nothin' illegal ter nobody an' nothin'."

The position was well taken, but his opinion was not fixed enough to make him venture forth when he heard the police come. Evidently the tenant of the room was a person of some nerve,

for he received them very politely, and, after expressing surprise when he had been told the nature of their errand, he bade them search and welcome.

It was done. They found nothing. Then they went away.

It was ten minutes later that the door of the secret closet was opened. The stranger stood smiling on the further side.

"You can come out," he remarked. "The whole party have left the house. You are safe. Come!"

Swipes obeyed.

"Rather a close call," he exclaimed.

"Decidedly so."

"Mister, I am awfully obliged ter you. I don't want ter be gobbled, an' you did the white by me. I'm yer friend from this on."

"I like to help a person in need."

"I s'pose you are a friend o' Carl Cavendish's?"

"No. On the contrary, I never saw him. I am a newcomer in this house, and I know nobody here. I don't suppose I should have interfered in this case only you were so young. I know what it is to be hounded by the police!"

The speaker grew suddenly grave and his lips trembled. He sighed deeply, and Swipes felt his pity rise.

"Mebbe you didn't deserve it."

"I am sorry to say I did deserve it all. I was a fool—a blind fool! Why, oh! why did I take such a step. But I wander. Boy, sit down! This is a lonely life here, and your company will be welcome. Then, if there is more danger, you can flee to the secret recess again."

"Have you been usin' it, too?" asked Swipes, his curiosity aroused.

"No."

"You look as ef you'd had a pile o' trouble."

"I have—trouble and illness."

The speaker sighed and leaned his head heavily on his hand. His looks bore witness to his last assertion. He looked far from well then.

"Hidin' from the police, boss?"

"You ask too much now. But then, of course, if it were so I should not have taken you in. Oh! I am a free man!"

He said it bravely, but Swipes was not so sure it was true. He had his own opinion of the man, though he wondered at seeing a criminal with such a face. It was a prepossessing face, all things considered.

"What's your name?" he pursued.

"John Barnes."

"A plain, sensible name."

"What's yours?"

"Daniel Swipes Norton," boldly admitted the fugitive.

"What is your trouble?"

"Too much inquisitiveness. Ef I hadn't been foolish enough to play detective I wouldn't be in this measly fix now. Do ye read the papes?"

"Yes."

Swipes was not willing to rest under the shadow of suspicion, and he determined to clear himself to this pleasant-faced young man. Thus he continued his questioning:

"Have you read anything about one Jimmy Thompson?"

The man who claimed to be John Barnes had been sitting listlessly, but the question brought him up in his chair like a flash. He looked hard at Swipes, and seemed to be frightened by something.

"What?" he demanded.

"Ever hear of Jimmy Thompson?"

This repetition was very mildly and hesitatingly put. There was a glare in John Barnes's eyes that worried Swipes, and he was not so anxious to press his

interrogations. He felt obliged to do so, however, and then was impressed by the pause which ensued. John Barnes was breathing heavily, but it was long before he found words. Finally he responded, almost gaspingly:

"No! Yes! I don't know—I seem to have read—Who was he?"

"Lived at Mulligan's Ark."

"I—I think I read of him."

John Barnes was excited and trembling, and the words passed his lips with tones that quavered as much as his body. Swipes saw all this, and, quick to seize upon circumstances, he was almost overwhelmed by the thought that rushed upon him.

"This feller is the one who stole Jimmy Thompson's body!"

The shadower became a very different person. All of his keenness was aroused, and he eyed John Barnes with emotions surging through him which made his regard wild and strange.

His companion said no more, and Swipes tried desperately to get his wits back so he could speak further.

"He went an' died," he finally remarked.

"I read of it," admitted John Barnes.

"Then he was stole."

"Yes. Pitiful fact!"

"Well, I dunno about that. This Jimmy Thompson was a rascal o' the first water. A thief, a swindler, an' a murderer!"

The young detective said this to get into John Barnes's good graces and make him confess that he had stolen the body, if possible. The result, when seen, was a surprise to Swipes.

John Barnes leaped to his feet. His eyes glowed almost like those of a madman, and he threw up his hand as if to strike the boy.

"It is a lie!" he shouted. "He was nothing of the sort—he was weak and foolish, but never criminal. A thief, perhaps, but a swindler, or murderer, never! It is false, false, false!"

He repeated the word with constantly rising power, and it became almost a shout at the end.

Swipes was bewildered. Why should a body-snatcher defend his victim?

"Others don't say so," stubbornly responded the boy.

"I care not what they say. Time will tell—I, at least, know now. Do I not know? Have I not suffered enough to know? You say that others don't say so. What others?"

"The police."

"What do they say?"

"That Jimmy stole the money from Wischardt, Veach & Co.'s safe," persisted Swipes, getting too interested in his argument to be exactly aware of what he was saying.

"Are they on the track?"

"Yes."

"Providence grant they may be too late!" exclaimed John Barnes.

He began to pace the floor in a headlong way. Swipes could not guess why he was so upset, but the visitor determined to press the point and see what could be made out of John.

"Yes, they're hot on the track. They say Jimmy will get twenty years, an' it's none too much. Ha, ha, ha! won't he look fine, peerin' out of a prison cell up Sing Sing way?"

John Barnes threw up his arms wildly.

"I will die before I will go there!" he shouted.

"You will die? What hev you ter do with it? You, you? Why, I was talkin' of Jimmy Thompson! Why should you be so upset over his affairs? I've heard it said he hadn't no close friend, an'

nobody ter feel much interest. Why the dickens be you so wrought up over his case?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF MYSTERY.

The plain question was too much for John Barnes. He stopped in his excited walk and stared at the shadower blankly. He was confused, and, though he appeared to want to speak, not a word passed his lips.

Swipes, now all aroused, ran his gaze over his companion. New ideas had come to him, and he was breathless with his suspicions.

"By jing!" he added, excitedly, "ef such a thing was possible I should say you was Jimmy Thompson, alive!"

The master of the room reeled back.

"What?" he cried.

"You look jest as I hev heard Jimmy described. But then, Jimmy died—or was supposed to. It's been a great mystery who stole him after he died—"

The shadower leaped to his feet.

"Say," he added, loudly, "I do believe you are Jimmy Thompson himself, alive!"

The man staggered and fell into a chair.

"Lost, lost!" he gasped.

The young detective was amazed. His companion's manner confirmed his suspicion, but, as he reflected upon it further, it seemed too wild and absurd to be entertained.

There was a lull of a full minute; then the silence was broken in an unexpected manner. The boy heard light, quick steps in the hall, then the door was dashed open and a woman ran in.

Stubby had an additional surprise.

It was Mrs. Gray—Mrs. Gray, excited, flushed and trembling.

She looked about; she ignored the boy; she rushed to John Barnes's side. She spoke vehemently.

"Flee, flee!" was the warning from her lips. "The police are coming!"

The word "police" stirred the man out of his other troubles. He looked up and saw who was there; then his face hardened.

"So it's you!" he exclaimed, bitterly.

"Yes. Go, Pliny, go! The police are coming!"

"What do you care? A pretty person you are to visit me! You did not take the trouble to do it when I needed you most."

"Brother, let us not speak of our old estrangement. Enough that I am glad to help you now. Go, go! I beseech you!"

"I have no refuge to seek. If I am run down I will face the danger and fight it out. I will not run. I remain here!"

He folded his hands and stood erect.

"The closet!" now cried Stubby. "In there with ye, Jeems!"

"I say I will not run. I remain where I am."

"No, no!" panted Mrs. Gray. "You must, you shall go! I have a carriage at the door. We will—Too late!"

Heavy steps sounded on the stairs outside the door. Every one instinctively realized what that meant. Mrs. Gray sunk into a chair, weak and trembling.

"Lost!" she moaned.

Nearer came the steps; then three official-looking men marched into the room. At their head was Peters, the detective. With a glance around the place he moved toward the master of the room.

"Pliny Hargrave," he severely spoke, "you are our prisoner! We arrest you for stealing money from the safe of Wischardt, Veach & Co., and, also, on suspi-

cion that you have acted the body-snatcher and purloined the remains of one James Thompson!"

Stubby heard the laborious speech with momentary confusion; then, as he realized that Peters had made some great mistake the boy burst out into a ringing laugh.

Peters regarded him sharply, whereupon Swipes added:

"That's the first time I ever heard of a man stealin' his own body!"

"I may be wrong about that part," replied Peters, with dignity, "but I believe this is the body-snatcher. Let that rest, however. Pliny Hargrave, we arrest you for theft!"

Hargrave held up his empty hands.

"I yield!" he calmly answered.

"Lost, lost!" murmured Mrs. Gray.

"No, no!" shouted a voice at the door. "Not lost, but saved!"

And yet another man rushed in and stood there, panting.

Hargrave brightened up wonderfully.

"Kellogg," he cried, "what luck?"

"Good! The very best! You are saved! The money is restored to its rightful owners, and they agree not to prosecute you. You are saved!"

"Thank Providence!" murmured Hargrave. "It will be a lesson to me. It was my first and only lapse from grace, and it will be my last. I am saved, saved!"

Peters looked suspiciously at his companions.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"There is no mistake!" declared Hargrave. "The facts are that I have restored the money I so insanely took, and I am saved."

"I guess not!" gruffly retorted Peters. "You will go with us to Police Headquarters."

"That is to be expected. I do not demur, for I go, knowing that, as Kellogg here says, all will be wiped off the books, and that I shall soon be free."

"I don't understand this."

"I can make it plain," responded Hargrave. "I did take the money from Wischardt, Veach & Co.'s safe. It was an evil deed, but I yielded to temptation. I had the means of taking it, and I wanted to speculate on somebody's money. I had none of my own. I took it. I risked two thousand dollars in speculation and lost it all."

"By that time I knew the police suspected just who had taken it. By then, too, my better nature was at work. I deeply regretted my course. I determined to make good my theft."

"I obtained some law work to do, and began to labor desperately to get money to accomplish my end. I worked day and night. I had assumed the name of James Thompson and taken quarters in Mulligan's Ark. There I lived with miserable frugality, from which I rarely departed. My friend, Harold Forrestal, had a well-furnished flat. I now and then indulged in rich suppers there, and even at costly restaurants, but I should have gone mad without some relaxation from my grinding toll."

"At Mulligan's Ark I was always busy, seeking desperately to pay what I had stolen. At last the money was earned, and it only remained to restore it. But, I feared I could not make peace with those I had wronged. In this crisis my friend, Harold Forrestal, came to my aid, and his suggestion opened a way not before thought of by me."

"It was that I should seem to die; that I should take a medical drug which would suspend the actions of even breath and make me seem dead. He knew of such a drug. It was settled that I was

to die. He was to take charge of my supposed corpse, after I had been identified as the thief, and was then to save me from burial."

"After this he was to make peace with those I had wronged, and, in time, I thought I could reappear as a free, safe man."

"I took the drug; I lost consciousness. Maybe Forrestal was timid; but, somehow, it did not work as I had expected. I think there was less than the proper dose given me."

"I recovered consciousness to find myself in my coffin. I was not alone in the room. My sister here, from whom I had long been estranged, was there. She had read of my death, so called, and come to see me. It was done secretly, at night. Now, the money I had earned had been accidentally left by Forrestal, in his nervousness. She found it, and, reaching into my coffin, tore up the lining at one point and thrust the money into the recess. Doubtless she thought it had better be buried with me and my crime."

"She went away. Then nature fully asserted itself. I aroused, threw off the spell of the drug, and then yielded to horror. It was an awful thought to me that I had been in my own coffin. I dressed, took the money, fled from the house and sought a new refuge. I found it here, and here I have since been, but not inactive. Giving Forrestal no clew to my escape, I sent for this other friend, Kellogg, and he has negotiated with those I wronged, and has restored the money."

"Yes," added Kellogg, "and you are safe from prosecution."

"Looks as if I am to make no haul," murmured Peters.

"I'll give you one!" cried the boy shadower eagerly. "Come down stairs an' I'll show you a thieves' den, with all the plunder inter it! I want you ter see what Mister Carl Cavendish is, in real life! As for you, Jimmy Thompson Hargrave, you are a stunner, an' no mistake, but we all hold out our hands ter you. A repentant sinner is a lad o' promise. Them is my sentiments, an' I'm rather glad you are all hunk. Come on, fellers! Let's raid Carl's den. Oh! but won't the New York Sharp be mad!"

The next day there was a sensation in New York. It was then known that a mere youth had been the means of capturing two dangerous crooks, and yet more, there was the remarkable case of Pliny Hargrave. Taken all in all, it was sensation galore!

Carl's connection with the mystery was easily explained. He had obtained a clew to Pliny's secret before the bogus death, and Pliny and Forrestal knew it—they had seen him and a one-handed man spying upon them. Carl had a woman accomplice in Mulligan's Ark, and it was from her he learned enough to assure him that he might find treasure in the coffin, so he made his big bid to secure it, before and after the "body" disappeared.

The reward of five thousand dollars for the recovery of the body had been offered by Forrestal. He it was who had hired two men to lure Stubby Swipes into the alley. He wanted him out of the way, for a time. Swipes was inclined not to forgive this, but finally joined in the era of good feeling.

Carl Cavendish and Bat were duly tried, convicted and sent to State's Prison.

Pliny was released from police surveillance, and then he began his career anew, seeking to be an upright man. He was reconciled to his sister, and For-

restal continued to be his steadfast friend.

All remains well at Mulligan's Ark. The people live and flourish, and Stubby Swipes is their hero of heroes.

"Sure," they say, "the lad is a born detective. Only fer him poor Jimmy would have fared hard, an' there's a glorious future before him. He's doing well now, an' he'll make a great man yet. Every wan ave us love him. That boy is a jewel!"

THE END.

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